

EDIBLE NATION

CAPTURING SUMMER: PRESERVING THE HARVEST

BY EUGENIA BONE

I always walk to my local farmers' market on Saturdays reciting the mantra, *I will not over-buy, I will not over-buy*. Then I smell the strawberries, or notice the yellow zucchini blossoms, the tomatoes fragrant as flowers, and the sea scallops cold and fresh off The Brianna, the sweet corn a dozen ears for \$3, and nettles? *I love them!*

When my husband sees all that food he inevitably gives me the "You need to join a group" look. But within a couple of days, I manage to process all that glorious produce into jars and freezer bags, tucked away for future use, preserving the season in all its wonderful optimism and freshness. So I can because I can't resist buying, but I also can because I can't give up the day. I just want the bounty to go on forever, and in ways both literal and metaphorical, canning is a tactic for capturing time—and saving it.

During the course of the year I put up a wide variety of foods that I use in multiple dishes, from cured bacon—which is ridiculously easy and qualitatively better than commercial—to make frisee salad with lardons and poached eggs and savory chicken Canzanese with bacon, garlic, sage and rosemary; to Foriana sauce packed in oil and refrigerated, a combination of walnuts, pine nuts, raisins, garlic and oregano, which I use to stuff clams and thick-cut pork chops. I preserve all sorts of things: Smoked chicken breasts for salads and sandwiches; pickled cauliflower to make a delicate poached fish salad, and a romping vegetable side with tomatoes and black olives; and brandied figs, to cook into sweet rich sauces for quail and duck, stir into mashed sweet potatoes or make into a grownup Fig Newton. In the fall I can tuna and, after allowing it to season for six months, I use it in pasta dishes, composed salads or vitello tonnata, all excellent in the spring. I also make sweet concoctions, like frozen grated apples flavored with warm pie spices, which I defrost and dump in a sweet crust to make a pie, or roll into a crisp strudel, and from the left-over juices, icy apple pie-flavored granita; and Concord grape and walnut conserve, which I dump into a sweet crust to make a tart, or mix with chocolate, stuff into ravioli and fry. It's a total kick to be able to throw a dinner party where all you have to do is buy the protein and the garnish.

Eugenia Bone



THREE CITRUS MARMALADE

Make 4 half-pints

This is a great marmalade. It is, of course, wonderful on bread, or warmed up and poured over vanilla ice cream or toasted pound cake, but because it is not too sweet, this marmalade is terrific cooked with fish and poultry. You can use different types of oranges and lemons in this recipe (but not limes) as well as alter the lemon/orange/grapefruit ratio: the recipe will still work. You just need to follow the basic formula of 1 cup of fruit pulp to 1 cup of sugar.

Citrus fruits are, of course, high in acidity (which is why you need so much sugar), and because bacteria cannot grow in a high acid environment, they can be safely water bath canned. Kept in a cool, dark pantry, the marmalade is good for a year.

- 1 grapefruit (I prefer red)
- 3 oranges (blood and honeybells are my favorites)
- 3 Meyer lemons
- 5 cups sugar
- ½ tablespoon butter

Peel the skin off the fruit in as big pieces as you can. Cut most of the white pith off the peels by scraping away with a pairing knife. If lots of pith is stuck to the fruit, you must pick it off. It's OK if you don't get all the pith off the fruit and the rind.

Cut the rinds from 2 lemons and 1 orange into little matchsticks. You should have about 1 cup. Discard the remaining rinds. (You may want to reserve some rind to use as a garnish.)

Remove the seeds from the fruit. (Leaving the seeds in will give the marmalade a bitter taste—not unpleasant, but rather like Scottish-style orange marmalade.) To remove seeds, cut the fruit in half along the equator and pop the seeds out with the tip of a paring knife. Grind the fruit in a food processor to a chunky pulp. There should be about 5 cups. But measure the pulp you have, as there can be some variation in the amount of pulp a piece of fruit produces, and you will have to adjust the amount of sugar you add accordingly: 1 cup of sugar for every 1 cup of pulp.

In a medium sized pot add the rinds and 3 cups of water. Cook over a medium heat until the rinds are tender, about 25 minutes. Cool, then add the pulp and let it rest for 2 hours, covered, in the fridge.



In a large wide heavy bottomed pot add the pulp, the rinds and their cooking water, the sugar and the butter. (The butter helps keep the marmalade from foaming up. Nonetheless it will foam up some. The marmalade will thicken quicker in a wide pot than a deep one. Be sure the pot is not filled more than halfway, to lessen the opportunity of a messy foam-up.) Cook over a medium low heat for about 30 minutes. Remove the foam as it builds up and stir the marmalade down. If you have a culinary thermometer, the temperature will need to reach 220°F for the marmalade

to jell. Simply stick the thermometer in the hot marmalade and rest it against the side of the pot. Place the lid on the pot to hold the thermometer in place. It will take seconds to get a reading. The marmalade will darken to an amber color.

You can do a set test by putting a bit of the marmalade on a spoon and allowing it to cool. If the marmalade wrinkles when you push it with your finger, it is ready to can. This is a loose marmalade, but if it comes out stiff, don't worry. Just warm it up before using it in the recipes.

Bring 4 half-pint jars, their bands and new lids to a boil in a large pot of water with a fitted rack. Boil for 10 minutes. Remove the jar with tongs (the tongs don't need to be sterilized). When the jars are dry but still hot, pour in the marmalade, leaving about 1 inch of headroom at the top of each jar. Wipe the rims, place on the lids and screw on the bands fingertip tight.

Place the marmalade in a pot with a rack deep enough to cover the jars with 2 to 3 inches of water. Bring the water to a boil over a high heat. Process the marmalade for 10 minutes. Turn off the heat and, after a few minutes, remove the jars. The marmalade will seem runny at first. It's OK. It will thicken up as it cools. You will hear a popping noise as the vacuum is created in the jars. Allow the jars to sit, untouched, for 6 to 8 hours. When they are cool, test the seals. (You can test a seal by unscrewing the band and lifting the jar by the edges of the lid. If you can lift the jar, the seal is good. If the lid comes off, the seal has failed and you must reprocess the jars with new lids. Don't worry though; failure rate is really quite low.)

Store in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year. Refrigerate after opening.

—Eugenia Bone

About 25 percent of all households in the USA preserve foods, the majority of whom live in the country, and for all sorts of reasons: necessity, pleasure, health (to wit: a serious canner friend of mine from Routt County, Colorado, told me a story about a mortician in her town. "He said in the past morticians used to have to get a body into the earth real quick, but nowadays a human body will hold for two weeks due to all the commercial preservatives he's eaten"). Despite the fact that canning is primarily a country occupation; it makes a hellavalot of sense in the city, too. Home canning reduces your carbon

footprint, increases the quality of your dining experience, and provides a sense of independence from the industrial food complex—all excellent reasons to get into it. Small batch recipes can be done in a tiny kitchen, and if the recipes are sophisticated but simple, and constitute the primary flavor of dishes that can be prepared over the next few weeks or months, and up to a year, you can save lots of time on shopping and dinner preparation. Plus, it's rewarding, relaxing, and cheaper than psychotherapy. And of course, canning is a very satisfying approach to eating during a recession.

FOOD PRESERVATION TECHNIQUES

Basically, in home preservation we either a) kill all spoilers, or b) retard the growth of spoilers: You can't get sick from a spoiler that is inert.

Water bath canning: This is a way of processing high acid foods like fruits and pickled vegetables for long-term storage. Because spoilers, including *Clostridium botulinum*, the bacteria that causes botulism, cannot develop in a high acid environment, foods that have a pH value of 4.6 or less are safe to water bath can. High acid food is packed into clean or sterile glass jars with metal bands and new lids, and the jars are boiled in water for a prescribed amount of time. Successful water bath canning is composed of two simple stages: killing elements that cause spoilage of foods (enzymes, mold, yeasts and bacteria), and establishing a sealed container where new elements cannot be introduced. These conditions, combined with the high acidity of the food within the jar, ensure that harmful microorganisms do not develop and the food is safe to store on the shelf. This process is ideal for fruits.

Pressure canning: You must own a pressure canner to process foods this way, where foods are processed in glass jars under pressurized heat for a prescribed amount of time. Steam builds up in the airtight cavity of the pressure canner, accomplishing the same thing as a water bath canner, but at much higher temperatures. This technique kills all spoilers. Period. Pressure canning is used when processing low acid foods (pH 4.6 and higher), like vegetables without added acid, meat and fish.

Freezing: This is the process by which food is solidified by bringing it to temperatures between 0°F and 32°F, which in turn slows the metabolism of foods and the spoilers that may live on them. Spoilers are not destroyed, but they don't bloom, either. With proper defrosting and prompt cooking and/or heating, spoilers on foods that have been frozen will never amount to anything. This process is effective for a large variety of foods.

Pickling (preserving foods in vinegar, packing into glass jars and then water bath canning): Pickling is the process of

preserving foods in a high acid solution. Spoilers cannot grow in a high acid environment. This state of high acidity is achieved two ways: by means of salt, and by vinegar (though when you pickle with vinegar you usually add salt as well). The pickled foods in this book are preserved for shelf life by water bath canning. This process is good for low acid (pH 4.6 and up) vegetables.

Salt curing (preserving foods in salt) and smoking (preserving foods with a combination of salt curing and heat from the smoke):

Curing is the art of permeating food with salt via a dry cure (combining the food with dry salt) or a brine (soaking the food in salt and water combined). Salt urges water from cells, which dehydrates the flesh, and as spoilers need moisture to grow, salt cured foods provide an inhospitable environment for microbes. Likewise, salt enters and dehydrates the microbes themselves, causing havoc

with a spoiler's ability to survive. Cured foods must be refrigerated. Smoking (inundating a food with hot or cold smoke) is often performed in conjunction with curing. Smoking adds flavor, kills microorganisms through heat, and extends the life of the product. It is an excellent process for proteins.

Preserving in oil (covering foods with oil and refrigerating):

In this process, foods are covered in an impenetrable layer of oil and refrigerated. Foods that are pre-cooked—which kills many spoilers—before being covered in oil and refrigerated last longer than raw foods that have been covered in oil and refrigerated. As air cannot penetrate olive oil, it acts as a seal between the foodstuff and the environment, putting off the growth of spoilers longer than simple refrigeration. The bacterium that causes botulism prefers an anaerobic environment, but can't bloom into toxin under refrigeration. The downside of preserving in oil is the food becomes saturated with oil, and so is useful only in recipes to which you would have added oil anyway.

Well-Preserved is composed of recipes using these six different food preservation techniques, all simple, all safe.

TIPS FROM A SAN DIEGO GROWER

Stephenie Caughlin, owner of Seabreeze Organic Farm, a CSA operation in San Diego's Arroyo Sorrento area, is an enthusiastic supporter of home canning and other methods of preserving foods. She readily suggests locally grown crops as good candidates for preserving. Nasturtium capers, for instance.

"Nasturtiums grow wild in the spring in San Diego County," said Caughlin. The green seeds can be collected and preserved "just like you would a pickle. Follow the instructions for pickling cucumbers."

With the ongoing recession, Caughlin sees home canning and preserving as an old idea made new again, and is eager for more people to learn about it.

"Nobody knows what blanching is any more!" she laments.

Jenn Valdez, Caughlin's personal assistant at Seabreeze, called blanching and then freezing vegetables a great way "to stretch out the bounty of a growing season. Blanching is a technique that keeps vegetables crisp and tender so they retain their texture, color and flavor."

To blanch:

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
2. Place washed vegetables in a large colander and put the colander in boiling water for 2–3 minutes (harder vegetables like carrots may need a minute longer).
3. Remove colander from boiling water and plunge it into a container of ice water.
4. Divide up portions in freezable containers and freeze.

"After the vegetables have been blanched, they will freeze beautifully," said Valdez. Among the summer crops that she said lend themselves well to freezing are corn, peas, squash and zucchini, all of which of course are available locally in San Diego County.

In addition to the Ball book on home preserving mentioned in Bone's article, Ball's parent company, Jarden Home Brands, has a website that explains blanching and other methods of home food preservation. Just go to freshpreserving.com.

—Vincent Rossi

FIGS IN BRANDY

Makes 4 pints

I love to eat fresh figs in pressed foccacia sandwiches with prosciutto, or after dinner, with nuts and gorgonzola cheese. For post-season garnishes and snacking, I put up fresh figs in a light simple syrup. But when it comes to cooking with heat, I prefer to use the more durable dried figs that have been re-hydrated in sugar syrup and brandy. These are deliciously sweet and boozy—puréed and spread over shortbread they make a grown-up Fig Newton. Chopped and stuffed in a baked apple, and served with a shot of thick eggnog, they make a great holiday dessert. But I like them best in savory recipes. This recipe is adapted from two sources: The Michigan State University Extension, and the Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving. Figs do have enough acidity to water bath can, but they are borderline (like tomatoes) so you must add citric acid to increase the acidity. (Brandy is more acidic than figs.) Allow the figs to season for two weeks. Thereafter, they will keep for up to one year.

2 lbs dried figs (I use Calimyrna), soaked in water to cover for 12 hours in the fridge, drained

6 cups water

1½ cups sugar

¼ cup brandy plus more for topping off

1 teaspoon citric acid

Place the figs in a large pot and add the water. Bring to a boil over a high heat and cook, uncovered for 15 minutes. Add the sugar and return to a boil. Boil rapidly for about 2 minutes, and then add 1



cup brandy. Bring back to a boil.

Have ready 4 scalded pint jars, bands and new lids. (To scald, simply dip the jars in boiling water. You don't need to sterilize the jars as you will be processing them for over 10 minutes.) In the bottom of each jar place ¼ teaspoon citric acid. Stuff in the figs and cover them with the brandy syrup, leaving 1 inch of headroom. If there is not enough brandy syrup, bring the liquid up to 1 inch of the rim with extra brandy.

Place the jars on a rack in a big pot and cover with 3 inches of water. Cover the pot and bring to a boil over a high heat, then lower the heat to medium and gently boil the jars for 20 minutes. Remove the cover and then, after about 5 minutes, remove the jars. Allow the jars to cool, untouched, for 4 to 6 hours. Check the seals and store in a cool, dark place. Refrigerate after opening.

Note: These figs will get better over the course of the year.

FORIANA SAUCE

Makes 3 half-pint jars

Foriana sauce comes from the island of Ischia off the coast of Naples, Italy, where it is served on pasta as a Lenten dish. This is my father's recipe, one I often serve to vegetarians, who almost always have an epiphany when they taste it on spaghetti. It makes a quick and exotic bruschetta, and indeed, when added to other dishes, Foriana sauce adds a Moorish quality that is savory, sweet and spicy. The sauce is heated, then packed in sterilized jars, covered with olive oil and refrigerated. The oil acts as a barrier between the sauce and spoilers in the air in the fridge, and refrigeration retards the growth of spoilers. Foriana sauce lasts about 10 days.

1 cup walnuts

1 cup pine nuts

5 tablespoons sliced garlic (about 10 large cloves)

3 teaspoons dried oregano

3 tablespoons olive oil plus more for covering the jars

½ cup white raisins

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Olive oil to cover

Place the walnuts, pine nuts and garlic in a food processor and pulse to a fine chop, until the nuts are like damp granola. Add the oregano and pulse a few more times to combine.

Heat the olive oil in a medium sized skillet over a medium heat. Add the nut mixture, the raisins, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook for about 5 minutes, stirring constantly to avoid burning or searing.

Bring 3 half-pint jars, their lids and bands to a boil in a large pot of water with a fitted rack. Boil for 10 minutes. Remove the jars with tongs (the tongs don't need to be sterilized). When the jars are dry but still hot, pack in the Foriana sauce, eliminating as many air pockets as you can. (I press down with the knuckles of my index and middle fingers to pack the sauce—be sure your hands are clean.) Fill the jars to about 1 inch below the rim. Add a ½-inch layer of oil to cover. Wipe the rim with a paper towel, place on the lid and screw on the band.

The Foriana sauce will keep in the refrigerator for about 10 days. Check on the sauce a day after you make it: You may need to add more oil to ensure it is completely covered.

Be sure to cover the surface of the Foriana sauce with oil after each use. Remove only the quantity of sauce that you need for a dish and allow that to come to room temperature. Cover the remaining sauce in the jar with oil and promptly return it to the fridge.