

Preserving the Harvest – Enjoy Produce All Year Long!

Submitted by: Barbara Roths, Family Consumer Sciences Agent, K-State Research and Extension, Butler County.

How's your garden growing? Have you been to visit your local farmer's market or a "pick your own" orchard recently? You can enjoy that produce now – AND in the cold winter months to come—by preserving the harvest!

Food preservation may be done through a variety of methods that could include freezing, canning, or pickling. Choose the preservation method that fits your needs and storage space. With any of these methods, choosing tested recipes, using the proper equipment, and following safe food handling instructions will provide a tasty, high-quality product that is safe to eat.

Freezing food is easy, convenient, and the least time-consuming food preservation method. Freezing does not kill bacteria, it only slows down the growth of bacteria and slows the enzyme activity which can affect the safety and the quality of the food. Freezing will affect the texture of any food because the water in the food expands and breaks cell walls. This results in softer products, especially in fruit. Quality is also affected by fluctuating temperatures during freezer storage. For best storage, keep the freezer below 0°F.

Home canning of foods is done using one of two processing methods, depending on the type of food being canned.

- High-acid food like fruits, jams and jellies, and pickles, all contain enough acid to be processed in a water bath canner. This method requires a large kettle with a metal rack to hold jars during processing in a boiling water bath.
- Low-acid foods, such as vegetables and meats, require use of a pressure canner. A pressure canner has a dial gauge or a weighted gauge, to measure pressure and ensure that certain harmful bacteria are not allowed to grow and multiply.

If you're new to the art and science of food preservation, or if you'd like to update your skills, go to K-State's Rapid Response Center – www.rrc.ksu.edu. Click on "Food Preservation." You will find up-to-date recipes that have been tested by Kansas State University and links to the National Center for Home Food Preservation (University of Georgia) and other university-tested methods and recipes. When these current food preservation recommendations are followed, home preserved foods can be very safe.

Maybe you'd like to see these brochures for yourself, take a look at the recipe book from University of Georgia, titled "So Easy to Preserve" or check out the DVD with the same title? Then stop by the Butler County Extension Office, 206 N. Griffith in El Dorado and we'll be happy to share this information with you. We're open from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday -- Friday.

Enjoy tasty home- and locally-grown fruits and vegetables all year long, be safe, and preserve the harvest!