

PREPARING FRUIT AND VEGETABLES FOR WINTER USE

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As Deducted from Two Summers' Experience and Diligent Study

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If the agitation and alarm excited by "Food scandals," with the details of which the newspapers have reeked lately, have no other permanent result, they have revived the custom of domestic preserving in thousands of households.

Canning is hardly fifty years old. It made its way but slowly for a time. We paid fifty cents apiece for cans of fresh tomatoes and one dollar for a quart of canned peaches. Then factories of canned goods started up like mushrooms after a summer shower all over the country; prices came down on the run under the weight of competition, and old fashioned preserves went out of favor. They were expensive; they took time and thought that might better be bestowed upon worthier objects, and they were less wholesome than fresh ripe fruits which retained, when canned, the flavor of the "real thing." Here and there a housewife who learned her trade in the late forties and early fifties was stubborn in the belief that preserves, properly made, hurt nobody, and that the canned fruits were insipid caricatures of the ripe originals.

By degrees thoughtful women with more advanced ideas upon most subjects have swung around to her standpoint with regard to conserves of fruit. We have learned that much sugar and long cooking prevent the generation of mischievous germs and that where there is a modicum of sugar, and that little, when combined with acid fruits is not cooked long, other agencies must be called in to secure sterilization. Hence--by a natural process

of reasoning--the lavish use of chemicals in canning factories. This admitted much became clear to the housemotherly perceptions that had puzzled her heretofore. We knew that canned fruits needed the addition of sugar and cream to make them presentable to our palates as desserts. We were aware, even after they were thus qualified and dressed for the table, of a slightly bitter flavor and of a certain roughness left upon the tongue.

Thanks to scientific sleuths we know now the full meaning of these peculiar features of the cheap and convenient substitutes for our grandmothers' preserves, and we have resolved--thousands of us--to do our canning and other kinds of preserving fruits and vegetables.

The enforcement of a new pure food law has made some strange revelations. We may have suspected that we were eating adulterated jams, jellies and preserves, but we seldom put our suspicions into words. When we read on the label of a jam jar that the contents are prepared with glucose and other ingredients which, to our minds, have no business there, the concrete fact is a trifle staggering.

One of the results of this discovery is a resolution in the minds of most of us to do our own preserving and canning and jamming at home. The resolve is strengthened by the indisputable fact that home made jams and the like taste far better than any one can buy for a reasonable price. Of course, there are certain varieties of these dainties which are put up by private persons for the public market, but the price of these is enough to deter the housewife from purchasing them for daily use. But when one can put up her own fruits at home for less money and

with better results, both in taste and in wholesomeness, than when she buys the ordinary conserves, she makes a mistake if she depends upon store products for her preserved sweets.

As a means of lessening the wear and tear, the housekeeper should see for herself that everything needful is in stock before she begins to work. Not only must she see that fruit and sugar are sure to be forthcoming when she is ready for them and that her preserving kettle is in perfect order, but also that jars and jelly glasses are plentiful and are supplied with good tops and rubber rings. A little foresight in this regard is a great saver of labor and annoyance.

Fruit jars should all be tested before being used. Partly fill the jar with water: put on rubber and screw top on tight. Then invert the jar and leave standing for several minutes. If the water leaks out around the top remedy the defect, by changing the rubber, top, or jar, which one is at fault, and discarding the defective one. When all jars are tested and proved water tight, remove the covers, place the rubber inside the jar, then put the jars in boiling water on the stove. The tops may be placed close to the jars they fit, or placed lightly on the top of the jars, in which case the water must cover the jars. Fruit jars should be sterilized about fifteen minutes. When used they should be taken from the water and the fruit put in without rinsing. Jelly glasses should be well scalded before using, but if they are cool before the jelly is put in, no great damage is done.

When ready to can the fruit, use a pie pan on which has been placed a paper folded several times, and the hot sterilized

jar placed on this paper. In this way the jar can be carried to the fruit kettle, filled, covered, wiped off and set aside, without burning the hands, carrying the heavy fruit kettle or dropping the fruit on the floor. This is the quickest, most cleanly and best method.

The selecting of the fruit is very important. For canning and preserving choose the fine, large fruits; the smaller ones may be used for jams and butter just as well. For canning and preserving the fruits should be ripe, nicely ripe, but still firm and solid. If too ripe they will have a tendency to become "mushy" in cooking. The "dead" ripe fruits may be used for jams and marmalade. In choosing fruit for jellying use that which is ripe enough to have flavor but not fully ripe. The reason for this is that immature fruits consist largely of cellulose, starch and gums. In ripening the major portion of the cellulose and starch is changed into sugar. The gummy material is known as pectose. In ripening the pectose is acted upon by a natural ferment, pectase, and this enzyme changes the pectose to pectine. The pectin coagulates in the presence of lime salts and becomes a semi-solid mass--which is called jelly. If the ripening continues too far, the pectine changes into pectic acid or metapectic acid, and this will not coagulate: therefore overripe fruit will not make jelly. Certain fruits contain a large amount of pectin (peaches for example) but will not make jelly, because they lack lime salts. If they are mixed with fruits containing these salts (apples for instance), they can be used successfully.

In canning fruits always choose nice, large, ripe fruits. Wash them well. For small fruits, such as plums, and berries of all kinds, wash in a colander. Place the fruit in a colander

and let the water from the faucet run over the fruit. If running water is not in the house dip the colander up and down in a pan of water several times and change the water from three to four times. Prepare large fruits by paring with a silver knife: dividing and stoning can be done most easily before paring. Fruits should be cooked enough to destroy germs, but not enough to destroy the natural flavor or to give a mushy appearance. Weigh the fruit before putting in the kettle. Add about one-third the weight of sugar and a little water--enough so that it can be seen in the kettle. When fruit is cooked tender, can and seal immediately. Steaming the fruit, then dropping it into a syrup, is perhaps the most preferred way of canning. Lay the fruit, peaches, pears, apples or quinces, in a steamer over a kettle of boiling water, laying first a cloth in the bottom of the steamer, and then cover tightly. Let the fruit steam about fifteen minutes or until tender. Make a syrup, and as the fruit becomes tender, drop it into the syrup for a few minutes, then put in the fruit jar; add the syrup until the can is full, and seal at once. An excellent syrup for canning fruit is made as follows: take sugar to equal one-third the weight of the fruit and two or two and one-half cups of hot water to every pound of sugar. Stir a little until the sugar is dissolved, and cook ten minutes after it has begun to boil.

For canning small fruits the process is much the same, although the amount of sugar varies with the tartness of the fruit. Strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, require one-fourth their weight of sugar, cherries and plums about one-half their weight, and rhubarb about three-fourths the weight of the fruit, and gooseberries an equal weight of sugar. Cherries should be

pitted before being canned.

Many people prefer to can their fruit without sugar. It is true that fruit canned without sugar is found to retain the fruit flavor more distinctly than that which is sweetened, but it is also true that fruit canned with sugar keeps better, and that when the sugar is cooked in the fruit it tastes better than when it is added later.

In canning vegetables use glass jars always. Apart from the danger that the acid of the vegetables will make a poisonous combination with a metal can, the amateur who undertakes to solder the top to make it air tight is likely to do the work unskillfully. Moreover, should the vegetables ferment, the housewife cannot detect the beginning of the mischief and check it by cooking the contents of the can again.

In canning tomatoes select ripe ones. Pour boiling water over the tomatoes: cover the pan in which they are, for five or six minutes. Then strip the skins and cut out defective or unripe parts. When ready set over a quick fire. Tomatoes should always cook rapidly, as long, slow cooking injures the flavor and color. Boil for ten minutes. They must be canned while still boiling, into scalding hot cans. The jar must be filled to overflowing, the rubber already in place. Put the cover on immediately and screw down very tightly.

Asparagus, peas and beans are canned very much the same way. In preparing, cut the stalks of asparagus to within two inches of the tips; shell the peas; string beans on both sides and cut in one inch lengths. Let each vegetable drop into ice cold water while being prepared. Put the prepared vegetable in a pan; cover with cold water slightly salted; boil until soft but

not broken. Transfer to hot jars, cover with boiling salted water from the kettle and seal. After this for three consecutive days set the jars of vegetables on the stove in water and keep at boiling point for an hour. This fractional sterilization is the only sure way of having vegetables canned so they will keep. These vegetables mentioned are almost the only ones which are usually canned in the home, but others would be prepared in much the same way.

Preserving is one of the easiest ways of putting up fruit and one of the most delicious. Choose fine, large, firm berries and fruits for preserving and always use the best grade of sugar. For preserving one general rule may be followed for nearly all fruits and the results will always be satisfactory. Use as much sugar (by weight) as fruit. Put a layer of fruit in the kettle, then cover with a layer of sugar, and so on until all the fruit is in or until the kettle is filled. Cover and set at one side of the range where it will heat slowly for the first hour. Quickened the boil and cook steadily for half an hour. Take out the berries or other fruit, a few at a time, with a large perforated skimmer, spreading them upon large platters with care that they do not crowd one another. Set the platters in the sun while the syrup in the kettle is left on to boil. Boil it fast and hard. It should be quite thick in half an hour, and the fruit may then be put back in the syrup, and it should be left to boil up once more. Then put into hot, sterilized jars, and seal tightly.

This method is perhaps the most used, the most practicable and gives the best results of any, but many people prefer to make the syrup first, of sugar and water, and when it is boiling well

to drop the prepared fruit into the syrup and let all cook until thick. In this way, however, the fruit has to cook longer and so becomes darker in color, although it is much more liable to retain its shape.

In late years the method known as "German preserved" or "Sun preserved" fruit has become very popular, and fruits preserved in this manner are indeed delicious. Berries--strawberries especially--are the fruits usually preserved in this manner. Prepare the berries for preserving in the usual way and put them with an equal number of pounds of sugar in a kettle. Bring to a gentle boil, and boil for one minute. Then skim out the fruit on to large platters, cover with panes of glass and set in the full heat of the sun. Leave them there all day, bring in at sunset and put them out again the next day and the next. After the berries have been removed, boil down the syrup until rich and clear, set away, and on the third day heat it again, add the berries, boil for five minutes and seal in sterilized jars.

In making jelly one or two jelly bags will be needed, and should be made from coarse cotton and wool flannel or coarse strong linen crash. Sew up a three cornered piece, cornucopia shape, rounding the bag at the bottom and cutting off the point; turn and sew again. Hem the top and run in a strong wire to keep the bag open; also attach three or four loops by which the bag may be hung above the dish. This is an excellent jelly bag and always ready for use.

In using large fruit for jelly, the fruit need not be peeled cored or stoned. It need merely be washed and all bad places cut out, and, if the fruit is quite large, cut in smaller pieces.

Put in over the fire in a kettle with enough water to keep the fruit from scorching, but not enough to cover it. Cook very slowly until the fruit is broken and soft, so that the juice flows freely. Take it from the fire and put it a little at a time into a vegetable press, crushing it, and then let it drip through the flannel bag. The juice for the jelly is then prepared.

In using several fruits for jelly pick over the fruit, put it over the fire and heat very slowly. The safest way to prevent scorching is to put a plate of thick stoneware in the bottom of the kettle. When the fruit is cooked until well broken take from the fire and let drip through the jelly bag. Work the juice through with a spoon, and squeeze from the pulp unless particularly clear jelly is desired. If so, allow the juice to drip without squeezing. For economy two grades of jelly may be made, clear jelly being from juice allowed to drip without squeezing, and a second grade made from juice obtained by squeezing the pulp. Strain but a small quantity at a time and remove the pulp before adding more.

The juice is now all prepared and the jelly may be made in one of two ways. The most commonly used method is that of taking to every cup of juice one cup of sugar; put both into the kettle at once, boil fifteen or twenty minutes and put into glasses. This method makes nice jelly, but it is much nicer when the juices are cooked first separate from the sugar. Cook the unsweetened juice twenty minutes from the time it bubbles well. It should thicken when a drop is placed on a cool plate. While the juice is heating spread the sugar in shallow pans, allowing one pound for every pint of juice. Set the pans of

sugar into the oven, leaving the door partly open.

When the juice has boiled twenty minutes stir in the sugar. Stir until the sugar is dissolved, then boil three or four minutes and remove at once from the fire. Pour into the jelly glasses and set uncovered in the sun. Wild grapes make a most excellent jelly.

Marmalades and butters are practically the same thing. These are made from the softer fruits, or from the smaller and not so fine looking ones as are desired for canning and preserving. They should be made on the same day on which canning or preserving is done, and all fruit not exactly right for one of the other methods for putting up can be put in the butter.

Almost any fruit can be used for butters. Apple, peach, apricot and crabapple butters are made in the same manner. Pare the fruit: the peaches and apricots must be stoned; the apples and crabapples must be cored. Weigh the fruit, and use an equal weight of sugar. Cook the fruit until soft; then put in one-half of the sugar, and cook slowly for half an hour, stirring often. After half an hour add the rest of the sugar, and cook steadily over a slow fire for an hour and a half or two hours, stirring constantly. Cook until the mixture becomes a rich red color. Can and seal. Marmalades and butters may be kept in stone jars, covered with a heavy paper. As they are so thick in consistency it is not hard to keep them so that they will not spoil.

From all smaller fruits containing stones or having skins which are not easily removed with the paring knife, the butters are prepared in a slightly different manner. Cook the fruit until the skins break and the fruit is soft. Strain through the

colander, rubbing the pulp well so that as much as possible goes through--leaving only the seeds and part of the skin in the colander. Measure the pulp and add the same amount of good sugar. Cook as for other butters--a long time, until quite thick.

Butters made in this manner are made from plums, grapes, oranges, and a few other fruits.

Berries are seldom used for butters: jams are usually made of them. After picking over and washing the berries weigh them and allow a pound of sugar for every pound of fruit. Turn the berries into the preserving kettle and let them heat slowly, mashing them well with the back of a wooden spoon (or a wooden potato masher may of course be used). After they have cooked for half an hour and are quite soft, put in the sugar and bring all to a good boil. Take out and put to one side. Bring the juice to a boil again and cook until it is thick; return the fruit to it, boil up well once, and put in jars, glass or stone, and seal. Some fruits are so juicy that half the syrup can be drained off and still leave enough for the jam. When this is done strain the syrup so as to remove seeds, etc., and cook until it jellies. Or the juice may be strained off before the sugar is added and jelly be made from this, allowing a pound of sugar to a pint of juice, and the jelly made as other jellies.

Another way to make good jam is the following: Boil and strain one-third of the berries to be used. Add to this juice as many pints of sugar as there are pints of berries remaining, and let it dissolve over the fire. Put in the berries and let it cook until the juice is a jelly. Mash the berries, take off the fruit and seal up in cans. Either method gives equally good results. Many prefer one, many the other, but this is a matter

of habit. Jams may be made from strawberries, wild or tame, gooseberries wild or tame, raspberries, red and black (the wild red raspberries make the richest jam), blackberries, dewberries, and currants.

Most people desire some pickle, catsup or other condiment with their meat. Perhaps young people whose appetites are always ready feel no need for a spice to their meat, but to those who have lost the hunger of youth, however, a little stimulant to a flagging taste and a jaded palate is welcome. For this purpose pickles, spiced fruits, catsups and the like are sought. Any woman with a particle of respect for her own digestion or for that of the family shrinks from many of the condiments of commerce. There is no doubt that houses are to be found which use pure materials in the manufacture of pickles and sauces, and the pure food law threatens them with penalties if they fail to state on the printed labels marking their articles, the exact components of their products. At the same time, some of us are skeptical enough to suspect that there may be some fashion of evading the law, and putting into "pure pickles" something we would not knowingly admit to our stomachs. So it resolves itself into this--that if we eat pickles and catsups and similar "appetite-ticklers" we must make them at home and know what they contain.

Tomato catsup is one of the most commonly used of these spices with meat. To make it take four quarts of ripe tomatoes, four onions, a dozen pieces of parsley, two bay leaves, have a teaspoonful of grated onion, one scant teaspoonful of cayenne pepper, a tablespoonful each of black pepper, cloves, mace, salt and sugar, and a tablespoonful of whole celery seed tied up in a piece of thin muslin or cheesecloth, and a pint of vinegar.

Put the tomatoes and onions over the fire together, cook until soft and then press through a colander. Put the liquid from this through a fine sieve and return to the fire. Add the seasonings and cook steadily for five hours, stirring often. Be sure that it does not stick or scorch in the bottom. It should cook until it is reduced to half the original quantity and quite thick. Take out the bag of celery seed, add the vinegar, set the catsup aside until cold, then bottle and seal the corks. Always keep in a cool place.

Chili sauce is also very nice. Peel a dozen large ripe tomatoes and four onions. Seed two green peppers or one red one; add these to the tomatoes and onions and chop all together until fine. Put with them two tablespoonfuls each of ground allspice, cloves and cinnamon, and salt, a teaspoonful of ground ginger, and four tablespoonfuls of sugar. Put in the preserving kettle with a quart of vinegar and boil steadily for two hours. When cool bottle and seal.

Everyone admits that pickled peaches are one of the most delightful things to eat with meat in the winter. For these choose the finest and largest. Clingstone peaches are often used. Pare the peaches but do not stone them. To seven pounds of the fruit, take four pounds of sugar, one quart of vinegar, one ounce each of cloves, cinnamon and allspice. Put the spice in a bag, or thin cloth, and boil it in the syrup three mornings in succession. On the fourth morning cook the fruit in the spiced syrup, and can.

It is no uncommon thing to hear of spiced or pickled cherries, but by far the most delicious cherries for use with meats are "salt" cherries. For this the late dark cherries are

the best. Put them into a quart glass jar, as many as it will hold, and then fill the jar with vinegar. Add to each quart jar a tablespoon of salt. Seal--and use in the winter. The cherries are red and full in shape and look very pretty on the plate with meat.

Each household has its favorite sauce, catsup or pickle. In our family it is picca-lilli which has the first place. Picca-lilli is made of vegetables and spices as follows:

Chop one peck of green tomatoes, one green pepper, one large head of cabbage and six onions together. Mix well with one cup of salt and let stand over night. Drain well, then boil in one quart of vinegar and two quarts of water twenty minutes. Drain again, then heat three quarts of vinegar, two pounds brown sugar, one-half pound white mustard seed, one tablespoon each of pepper, mustard(ground), cloves, cinnamon and ginger. Pour this over all and can.

Many people think that putting up fruit and vegetables is an arduous task. They think this because they make hard work of it. They work in the heat of the day, over a hot coal range, they do not have everything ready, and they do not properly sterilize all articles used. I saw in the paper a few weeks ago "Sleighbing would be a delightful recreation if one could only take it in June." So with canning and preserving and jelly making and similar occupations. If one could only do such work in mid-winter how much more pleasant it would be! But since this hot work falls in the heated term all that can be done is to try to pursue it in as cool a fashion as possible. There is nothing gained by standing unnecessarily over a roaring fire in a hot kitchen. Of course the task is eased for the women who

live in cities and cook by gas, but even the country dwellers may make life cooler if they will only try. An oil stove will do the work of preserving as well as a coal range and it may be placed in a cool spot. For my own part I arise early in the morning when I have jellying and preserving to do and get most of it out of the way before the heat of the day arrives. Other means may be sought for making the work less heating. The preparation of the fruit for cooking may be accomplished in a shaded corner of the veranda or in any other cool nook that suggests itself. There is no benefit either to the food or the maker in being needlessly overheated.

Canning and preserving is not hard, yet it can not be done carelessly. It is an art, and one who has good success always, follows closely the rules for preparing the fruit. Sterilization is the underlying principle. You cannot be too careful in preparing jars, tops and rubbers to do their part in the delicate process. It is never safe to use last year's rubber bands for this year's canning. They are cheap, but were they three times as expensive, the loss of two cans of fruit would be more than the price you would pay for the assurance that makes success doubly sure. Neglect of preliminary and perfect sterilization often ruins many a fine lot of canned fruit.

Besides sterilization, special attention must be given to weighing the fruit and the sugar, so that the proportion is correct, to the time of cooking, the hotness of the fire for different kinds of work, to the time the sugar is added to the fruit, and to sealing absolutely air tight, when the jars are full and scalding hot. Germs and bacteria in the air do not settle on the fruit as long as the steam is rising, but as soon

as it cools the dust particles holding bacteria fall on the fruit. For this reason they must be sealed while hot.

If all these principles are followed closely as a guide in making preserves, jellies and the like, there is no reason for the task being arduous beyond reason. Preparation for the work in the purchase of all needed ingredients and utensils, the choice, when possible, of cool weather, or if not, of a cool place in which to do the cooking, a determination to keep cool in any way possible, and to follow closely and carefully the correct methods for cooking, all help to rob the labor of its terrors. A lively foretaste of joys to come when the pantry shelves are filled will help to cheer the task.

Although all this paper is written in an impersonal manner, there is nothing recorded here which I have not actually made--at least once. All recipes given are the ones I have used the previous three summers in preparing fruit and vegetables for winter use in my home, modified to suit the taste of our family.

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