

### Dealing With Summer's Bounty

Did those tiny, innocent-looking vegetable seeds fool you this spring? Who could believe how many zucchini or pumpkins could be produced by one little squash seed? Who knew that one bean seed grew a giant plant that keeps making beans? Who knew that the pepper plant was going to go crazy making a zillion peppers? Don't be embarrassed – even experienced gardeners are often faced with this problem.

If you have more produce in your garden than your family can consume right now while it is fresh, it is time to get busy. Whether you preserve for winter use or give it away, the rewards will be much greater than letting it rot on the vine.

#### Canning

There are three basic types of canning: pressure canning for low acid foods such as beans and corn, boiling-water bath for high acid foods such as tomatoes and peaches, and open-kettle canning for very high acid foods such as jams and vinegary relishes. This article is not meant to be a canning tutorial. It is extremely important to use safe canning procedures to avoid dangerous bacteria growth that can cause the deadly form of food poisoning called botulism. Unless you are an experienced canner, read a good canning reference before attempting this method of food preservation.

Any food with a pH less than 4.6 must be canned with a pressure canner. This includes asparagus, beans, peas, carrots, celery, pumpkin, okra, onion, and corn. Many low-acid foods can be pickled and thus canned with a boiling-water bath. Asparagus, green beans, pumpkin, carrots, hot peppers and onions are delicious when pickled. Corn can be easily made into a pickled relish.

The boiling-water bath method can safely be used for vegetables or fruits with a pH higher than 4.6. These include tomatoes, rhubarb, any pickled vegetable, and fruits such as apples, peaches, cherries, berries, apricots, pears, and plums.

The open-kettle method entails filling hot sterile jars with boiling-hot acid foods and covering immediately with hot sterile lids. The steam in the hot food condenses as the jar cools and creates a vacuum that seals the lid to the jar. This method is often used for jam, jelly, conserves, and relishes with a high vinegar content.

#### Freezing

Freezing is much easier than canning and does not heat up the kitchen as much. Pick vegetables early in the day and process immediately. Most vegetables should be blanched in boiling water before freezing in order to preserve their color, flavor and texture. Beans, corn, squash, leafy greens, peppers and berries are excellent candidates for freezing.

If you have bushels of extra tomatoes or squash, you can easily make and freeze a soup or spaghetti sauce base. Puree steamed squash with onion and spices and you have an instant soup base later in the year. Chop and cook tomatoes, peppers, onions and herbs and freeze as a base for spaghetti or pasta sauces.

Have lots of extra basil? Make a large batch of pesto and freeze in small jars. The pesto can be used alone or added into other sauces for extra flavor. Other herbs can be pureed with a little olive oil and frozen in ice cube trays.

## Drying

A dehydrator is an invaluable tool that will easily pay for itself if you are a serious gardener. Many fruits retain full flavor when dried, including strawberries, cherries, black currants, apples and pears. Others will disintegrate into useless blobs of goo, like red currants and caneberries.

Dried tomatoes, particularly cherry varieties or meaty varieties like Roma, are great to have on hand. They can easily be rehydrated and used on pizza, in pasta sauces, or even salads.

Herbs can be dried either in a dehydrator or by simply hanging them in a clean dry area. Don't forget those beautiful flowers in your garden. Some flowers, like statice or strawflowers, dry beautifully.

## Roasting

On edible types of sunflowers, such as 'Mammoth Russian' and 'Giant Grey Stripe,' the seeds will mature about three months after sowing. The flower heads will hang down and turn greenish-yellow on the back. Cut off the seed heads with about one foot of stalk attached and hang them in a warm, dry, well-ventilated, rodent-free place. Place cheesecloth or a paper bag with holes in it over each head to catch any seeds that may drop. When the heads are thoroughly dry, rub off any remaining seeds and store them in airtight containers.

To roast sunflower seeds, place them in 2 quarts of water to which 1/2 cup of salt has been added, bring to a boil, and simmer for 2 hours. Drain them well and dry on paper towels. Bake in a shallow pan in a 300° oven for 30 to 40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from the oven and add about 1 teaspoon of butter for each cup of seeds. Salt to taste.

Follow these steps to make your own roasted pumpkin seeds (or pepitas) after you have cleaned out a pumpkin. Remove the seeds from the pulp and fiber, wash, and dry on a paper towel for a day. Mix together 1 tablespoon vegetable oil to every 2 cups of seeds and toss until seeds are coated. Spread on a cookie sheet and add salt or other seasonings as desired. Bake the seeds at 300°F for about 45 minutes or until lightly browned, stirring every 10 to 15 minutes. Cool and store in an airtight container.

Green chilis, such as 'Anaheim,' take on a whole new flavor when roasted. Char the chili on all sides until the skin has blistered. Put in a Ziploc bag and let it steam for about 10 minutes. Slip the skin off and freeze in a single layer on a cookie sheet. After they are frozen, store in a freezer container (Ziploc bags work great). Pull out as many as you need and add to scrambled eggs, pizza, pastas, soups, or grilled cheese sandwiches for a little extra zip.

## Vinegars

Now is a good time to think about homemade hostess gifts for the holidays. Herbal vinegars are very easy to make. Pick stems of herbs early in the day, wash and blot dry if necessary, and check for insects that may be lurking (some things are not pleasant to find in your vinegar). Insert the entire herb stems in a decorative bottle and pour boiling vinegar over them. Put the lid on and let cool before storing. Basil, dill, tarragon, oregano, or combinations make very tasty vinegars.

Spicy peppers like 'Harbanero' or 'Thai Hots' also make interesting vinegar. Process the same as herbal vinegars, but please warn the recipient to use with care.

## Storing

Some vegetables and fruits can simply be stored for several months in a cool dark place. In the days before refrigeration, these were the foods that were relied on throughout the winter. Potatoes, apples, pears, pumpkins, and winter squash can be stored very successfully. Roots generally store very well in a refrigerator. Kohlrabi, beets, carrots, and radishes will often stay fresh for a month or more.

## Sharing

Does all of this sound like too much work? Don't want to heat up the kitchen blanching, canning and cooking? Don't just add to the compost pile – share your bounty! Visit the neighbors with loads of fresh fruits and vegetables. You may even build better neighbor relationships in the process. Large families and the elderly are particularly very receptive to fresh produce. Take bags of surplus to the office - they are guaranteed to disappear.

If you think those bunnies are cute (and they didn't already help themselves to the garden), share with them also. They are happy to receive the bottom lettuce leaves, the bruised beans, or the carrot tops. Chickens love to peck at those monster zucchinis that you forgot to pick. Don't overdo it though; even chickens can get tired of zucchini.

Food banks are always happy to receive your surplus. You can rest assured that your bounty will be put to good use. Here are some of the food banks in Clark County, Washington.

- F.I.S.H. – (Orchards area) 6008 NE 11th Ave., Vancouver, 256-2440, open 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. (except 12:00 to 12:30)
- F.I.S.H. – St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 14th and Franklin St., Vancouver, 695-4903; open 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday
- *Neighbors Helping Neighbors* – 21814 NW 11th Ave., Ridgefield, 887-3354; open 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. Tuesday and Friday only, please call first
- *North County Community Food Bank* – 701 E. Main St., Battleground, 687-7126
- *St. Vincent de Paul* – 2456 NE Stapleton Rd., Vancouver, 694-5388, open 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. Monday through Friday
- *Salvation Army* – 7509 NE 47th Ave., Vancouver, 694-9503
- *SDA Community Center* – 3200 St. Johns Blvd., Vancouver
- *SDA Community Center* – 410 E. Main St., Battleground

- *Share House* – 13th and Lincoln St., Vancouver, 695-7658, open 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. (except noon to 1:00 and 5:00 to 6:00)

If you have never preserved foods before, this may seem overwhelming. Do not take the all-or-nothing approach. Try your hand at canning a relish, making jam, or freezing a few green beans. Then give the rest away. Over a few years of gardening, you will soon learn how much slaving in the kitchen you can tolerate, how many meals of home-grown food the family will enjoy through the winter, and how many neighbors still open the door when you show up with an armload of squash. Happy harvesting!

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