

# Preserving fruits, vegetables not hard

Investing time and energy in preserving this summer's fresh fruits and vegetables can add variety and nutrition and health benefits to fall and winter meals.

Doing so also can trim grocery bills, said Karen Blakeslee, K-State Research and Extension food scientist, as seasonal produce is typically less expensive when at its peak production and supplies are more available.

Many people are learning more about fruits and vegetables by growing them in backyard and community gardens, Blakeslee said. Shopping at farmers markets and in supermarkets that offer fresh seasonal foods also can yield savings.

And, while some may recall their mothers or grandmothers in the kitchen with more tomatoes than they knew what to do with, Blakeslee said newer, time-saving equipment and tested recipes can make it easy for first-time food preservationists to achieve safe, high-quality food products.

Following directions provided with food preservation equipment, and reading, understanding and following a tested recipe exactly are key ingredients in successful food preservation, said Blakeslee. She also noted that summer produce can be preserved by canning, freezing or dehydrating.

Several factors – time, experience, equipment, appliances and food storage space – will need to be considered, Blakeslee said.

For example, folks who have a newer range with a smooth glass top will want to read their appliance manual. If the manufacturers recommend not using canning equipment, freezing or drying will be a better choice. Some brands of canning equipment are not recommended for use on a smooth glass-top range.

Freezing typically requires minimal equipment – a freezer or freezer space available in a refrigerator, blanching equipment such as a small strainer to briefly im-

## Test your food preservation know-how

New, time-saving equipment and a plentiful supply of tested recipes can simplify home food preservation and ensure success for first-time food preservationists, said Karen Blakeslee, a K-State Research and Extension food scientist.

Blakeslee, who spends her working hours answering food and food safety questions as coordinator for the university's Rapid Response Center, provided the following quiz to highlight frequently asked questions about food preservation:

1) True or False: Seasonal fruits and vegetables should be ripe and free of damage or spoilage to be candidates for home food preservation.

2) True or False: To freeze blueberries, wash and drain berries in a colander; spread dry berries on a baking sheet with a lip and place the baking sheet (with the blueberries) in the freezer; check at 30-minute intervals and transfer frozen berries to a freezer bag container. This is called dry-pack freezing.

3) True or False: A glass-top range cannot always bear the weight of a canning kettle. Read manufacturer's directions for the cook-top and canner before choosing a food preservation method.

4) True or False: A pressure canner gauge must be checked and, if necessary, replaced annually to ensure the canner reaches optimum temperatures for safe food processing.

5) True or False: Using proven, tested recipes for food preservation is recommended.

6) True or False: Food preservation is similar to baking; for optimum results, adjustments for altitude will need to be considered when choosing a recipe.

7) True or False: Use caution if buying canning and other food preservation equipment at garage sales or second-hand stores.

8) True or False: Home-canning protects foods for several years.

9) True or False: A pressure canner is used for low-acid foods, such as meats, vegetables, soups, fish or seafood.

10) True or False: A hot water bath can protect foods with a high acid content, such as fruit jams or jellies.

11) True or False: Food professionals advise shopping for canning, freezing supplies and containers before they are needed and checking equipment such as the gauge on a pressure canner well before it is needed.

12) True or False: An acid, such as bottled lemon juice, vinegar or citric acid, must be added to tomatoes to make them safe for canning.

### Answers:

1) True.

2) True.

3) True. Consider freezing or dehydrating for safe, effective alternate food preservation methods.

4) True. A variance of as little as two degrees may cause as much as a 30 percent reduction in accuracy. This can lead to food-borne illness, and, in some cases, potentially deadly toxins. Many K-State Research and Extension offices can check gauges on pressure canners; manufacturers also provide this service.

5) True. Recipes are like chemistry experiments – correct proportion of ingredients is needed to produce the desired safe, successful results.

6) True. Kansas' landscape rises from east to west, and residents are advised to check the altitude in their location. It is typically listed on maps or on the State Library of Kansas website at [skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/counties/index.html](http://skyways.lib.ks.us/kansas/counties/index.html).

7) True. Check canning equipment, as it must be in good condition for safe canning and food preservation. For example, rubber seals can dry out, crack or otherwise lose the ability to maintain a seal. Inaccurate pressure gauges can compromise results. The bottoms of canners may also be warped, and replacement parts may be impossible to find for many older brands of canners. Check canning jars for cracks, chips and nicks that will interfere with seals. Screw-top rings in good condition can be reused; lids cannot be reused.

8) False. Foods processed within the home should be labeled as to content; dated; stored in a cool, dry, dark place (if canned or dehydrated) or freezer; and used within one year or less. If foods have changed in color, appearance or have an odor, they should be discarded without tasting.

9) True. A pressure canner is needed to heat water to 240 degrees F to kill bacteria on low-acid foods that could cause food-borne illness.

10) True. A hot water bath is effective in processing foods with a high acid content.

11) True. Supplies can be hard to find or sold out, and parts (a gauge or rubber gasket are examples) may need to be ordered.

12) True. The natural acidity of tomatoes is not high enough to be considered a high-acid food. To increase the acidity, use one of the following and then process either with a water-bath canner or pressure canner:

a. Bottled lemon juice – one tablespoon per pint or two tablespoons per quart

b. Cider or white vinegar (with 5 percent acidity) – two tablespoons per pint or four tablespoons per quart.

c. Citric acid – one-fourth teaspoon per pint or one-half teaspoon per quart.

merse food in boiling water then transfer to ice cold water to stop the cooking process, freezer bags, boxes or jars, and recipe ingredients.

Dehydrating can be accomplished by placing foods sliced or cut in similar sizes on a tray in a newer oven (equipped with a fan) and set at a low temperature for a

specific period of time, or by using a food dehydrator, which typically has shelves, a fan circulating air to speed drying and a timer.

Because of high humidity, Blakeslee said drying foods in the sun is not an efficient drying method in Kansas.

A pressure canner is similar to a pressure cooker but larger and

necessary for processing low-acid foods such as meats, vegetables, seafood, soups and other mixtures. These foods need to reach temperatures of 240 degrees F to kill bacteria that may be present on meats and vegetables.

A water-bath canner can be used to process acidic foods, such as fruits, pickles, jams and jellies,

in a boiling water bath (212 degrees F).

While many people consider Kansas a flat landscape, it is not, said Blakeslee, who said that altitude must be considered in canning as much as it is in baking.

Those at higher altitudes must add processing time for water-bath processing or pressure for

pressure canning, said Blakeslee, who advised reading and following tested recipe directions.

Improper processing at higher altitudes can lead to spoilage because of underprocessing, she said.

For all canning, jars should be in good conditions and free from scratches, cracks or chips. Lids, or flats, should be new. Sealing rings can be reused if free from rust or other damage.

Once food is processed in the canner, the lids will be concave and produce a ping-like popping sound as they cool to signal successful processing and a vacuum seal to protect preserved foods.

All preserved foods should be labeled and dated after processing and before being moved to a pantry or other cool dry place for storage (according to recipe directions) and used within one year.

If considering food preservation for the first time, Blakeslee advised choosing a simple project, such as freezing tomatoes or making fruit jam or jelly.

To learn more, Blakeslee recommended:

1) Checking with local Extension offices to see if classes are offered.

2) Reading about food preservation. More information is available on the K-State Research and Extension Rapid Response website: [www.rrc.ksu.edu](http://www.rrc.ksu.edu). Food preservation guides for apples, cherries, cucumbers, green beans, peaches, peppers, strawberries, sweet corn, tomatoes and vegetables can be downloaded from the K-State Research and Extension Bookstore/Library ([www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/)). The "Complete Guide to Canning," a 196-page book with recipes from Purdue University (MF2904) is available from the Bookstore/Library for \$20.10.

Information also is available from the National Center for Home Food Preservation, a USDA website based at the University of Georgia: [www.uga.edu/nchfp](http://www.uga.edu/nchfp).

## Senior Progress Center

Seniors are invited to enjoy ice cream sodas with friends Wednesday at the Senior Progress Center.

Activities for the week: **Monday:** 10:30 a.m. dart game. **Tuesday:** 10 a.m. exercise; 11 a.m. bingo. **Wednesday:** 10:30

ice cream sodas. **Thursday:** 10 a.m. exercise; 10:30 a.m. pinocle game. **Friday:** 10 a.m. exercise; 10:30 a.m. Wii game.

Menus for the week: **Monday:** sloppy joes, O'Brien potatoes, corn, bun, apple sauce. **Tuesday:** pork roast, mashed pota-

toes with gravy, parsley buttered carrots, gelatin with fruit. **Wednesday:** crispy chicken salad, strawberries and bananas, bread sticks, bar cookie. **Thursday:** Wai-kiki meat balls, broccoli, peaches, rice, birthday cake. **Friday:** baked spaghetti,

green beans, cantaloupe, garlic bread, cook's choice complement.

The Thomas County Nutrition Center invites anyone 60 and older and guests to lunch Monday through Friday at the senior center. Home delivery is available,

as is pick-up service. A contribution of \$3 per meal is suggested for seniors, \$5.25 for others. For anyone under 60, home delivery is \$5.75.

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