



Cooperative Extension Service

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Food Preservation Methods

If you found my last column on food preservation FAQs interesting, then you may like this one as well. My apologies to those that are not so excited about food preservation...it is simply that time of year, and I promise a new and exciting topic the next time around.

If you are fortunate enough to have a garden full of veggies waiting to be harvested you may find yourself wondering exactly what you are going to do with all of that food. Your first choice, of course, is to eat it fresh. There is no substitute for the taste (and nutrient value) of freshly picked produce. Your next choice is to share your bounty with family and friends. The gift of food is a wonderful gift indeed!

If you're interested in preserving the fruits of your summer labors there are a few common methods, each having their own strengths and weaknesses:

Freezing is considered to be the simplest and most nutritious method of home food preservation. In fact, many foods can be directly frozen from the raw state! However, some foods (including most vegetables) do require a quick 'blanching', or partial cooking, for a quality product. This helps to slow the enzymes that cause the loss of color, flavor, texture, and nutrient value. One drawback to freezing is the large amount of energy necessary to lower and maintain the foods' temperature. This expense makes freezing foods the costliest method of preservation.

Canning is the most labor-intensive method for preserving food. While less costly than freezing, there is still some fuel usage in the canning process and start-up costs can be considerable. However, if you take care of your equipment (and don't give away too many jars!) your initial purchases should last you a long time. This makes home canning relatively economical, and nutrient retention of canned food isn't too far behind that of frozen food. Proper storage in a cool, dark pantry can help to discourage further nutrient loss.

Drying is probably the oldest method of food preservation, dating back to the sun-drying of foods as early as 12,000 B.C. While drying is the most time-intensive method, it is your dehydrator doing the work the majority of that time. Dried foods are lightweight, portable, and shelf-stable, making them ideal for outdoor adventurers or those with limited freezer or pantry storage. Dehydrated foods have the poorest nutrient retention due to the long exposure to heat and oxygen.

Ultimately it is up to you to determine your preferred method of food preservation, and I hope this will help you to make an informed decision. Further tested and reliable food preservation tips and recipes, along with links to other reliable websites may be found on the UW Cooperative Extension Service's food preservation website: http://uwacadweb.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition/Food_Preservation.htm, or on the Sheridan County website at http://www.sheridancounty.com/info/coop/fcs.php#Food_Preservation. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*