It’s “Berry” Time!

Summer has arrived when we bite into a juicy sweet strawberry or a tasty ripe raspberry.

Food preservation season begins with preserving berries: frozen, canned, dried, or jams and jellies. The freezing of berries is a great place for a “new” food preserver to develop their skills.

Preserve berries as soon as possible after harvest and at their peak of ripeness. This recommendation is key this season as 2014 strawberries may have an extra-high moisture content due to excessive rain. When berries hold more water than usual, they should be eaten or processed—made into jams or jellies, for instance—as soon as possible after picking to prevent mold and decay. If you can process the fruit the same day it's picked, the quality will be higher,

To wash, rinse strawberries thoroughly under cool running water, drain in a clean strainer, and pat dry with a clean paper towel. Do not soak berries in water.

Fruit can be frozen with sugar, in sugar water syrup, or unsweetened. A sugar or syrup pack is recommended to maintain better texture, flavor, and color of fruit. Artificial sweeteners give a sweet flavor but do not provide the beneficial preservation effects of sugar. See the sweetener label directions.

A convenient way to freeze berries is to tray pack. Simply spread a single layer of berries on a shallow tray and freeze. When frozen, promptly package, label, and return to the freezer.

Most frozen fruits maintain high quality for 8 to 12 months when frozen in quality freezer containers. Be sure to maintain your freezer temperature at 0°F or below.

Strawberries: Safe Methods to Store, Preserve, and Enjoy
http://bit.ly/1o2SDng

Whether you have your own strawberry patch, visit a “pick-your-own”, or stop by a farmers' market, you have wonderful access to berries, and that is a “berry” good thing.
**Fruit Salsa**

We usually think of salsa as tomato based with hot peppers and used as a dip. Today, more salsas are using fruit as the main ingredient. With the warm weather many fruits are plentiful, available at local markets and lower in cost.

Common fruits used in salsa are: kiwi, strawberry, watermelon, mango, peaches, berries, pineapple, and cantaloupe.

Fruit salsa is a great way to use ripe fruit for the best flavor. Most salsa recipes include a small amount of sweetener such as white or brown sugar, honey, fruit jelly, or syrups to draw out the juice in the fruit. Fruit salsas can also include onions, hot peppers and/or cilantro. These recipes are great served with meat, poultry or fish.

Making fresh fruit salsa is a good time to experiment and create your own recipe. To preserve it for future use, you can freeze salsa. If you want to can fruit salsa, be sure you use a tested recipe so it is safe to eat.

Check out tested canning recipes, such as Mango Salsa, Peach Apple Salsa and Spicy Cranberry Salsa at the National Center for Home Food Preservation [http://bit.ly/1mkjs6C](http://bit.ly/1mkjs6C).

**Fruit Syrups**

Cook juices from fresh or frozen blueberries, cherries, grapes, raspberries or strawberries to make syrups for toppings on ice cream, pancakes, or waffles.

Choose 6-7 cups of fresh or frozen fruit. A combination of fruits can be used. Wash and stem fresh fruits. Crush using a potato masher, food mill or processor.

Heat crushed fruit to boiling. Simmer until soft (5-10 minutes). Strain pulp through a colander, drain. Strain drained juice through a moistened double layer of cheese cloth or jelly bag.

Measure 5 cups of strained juice into saucepan and combine with 6¼-7 cups sugar (according to taste). Bring to a boil and simmer for one minute. Remove from heat, skim off foam and fill jars (about 9 half-pints), leaving ½ inch headspace. Process jars in boiling water for 15 minutes.

To make syrup with whole fruit pieces, save 1-2 cups of fresh or frozen fruit. Replace 1-2 cups of juice with the whole fruit before combining with sugar and simmer.

Once opened, syrups should be stored in the refrigerator. Syrups may be frozen instead of canned—leave 1-inch headspace in container.

**Tips for Terrific Jam and Jelly**

Start with firm, ripe berries. If berries are over-ripe or water-logged, you will end up with soft jam or jelly. Berries that are under-ripe or still white will make your jam and jelly very firm.

- Crush berries one layer at a time with a potato masher. Use a food processor only when recommended.
- Measure ingredients EXACTLY! Don’t add extra ingredients or fruit.
- Too much sugar will result in a very firm jam or jelly. Too little sugar results in a soft jam or jelly.
- If adding pectin, make sure it is “fresh”. Do not interchange liquid pectin for powdered pectin and vice versa.
- Do not double recipes because the jam or jelly may not set or gel.
Fruit Vinegars

Homemade fruit-flavored vinegars are a change to everyday salad dressings and sauces and can be used in meat dishes and cooked vegetables.

Popular fruits for flavored vinegars include: raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, cranberries, peaches, pears and lemon or orange peels. Frozen fruit also works well as the cells have begun to break down, releasing more juice.

You can use either white or apple cider vinegar. White will have a smoother flavor. Apple cider vinegar may change the color of your vinegar.

Basic steps for fruit vinegars:
• Put fruit in a non-metal bowl and pour vinegar over the fruit. Allow 1-2 cups of fruit per pint of vinegar.
• Cover and let set a couple weeks to blend.
• Filter with cheesecloth or coffee filter.
• Put into containers.
It takes about 10 days for most flavors to develop and 3-4 weeks for the greatest flavor to be extracted.

Store the flavored vinegar in a cool, dark place. For best quality, use within 3-4 months. Refrigeration is best for maintaining freshness and flavors. For additional information: http://bit.ly/1nCZDnG.

Keep it Clean

Preserving food at home is a great way to get good health benefits from fruits and vegetables.

Bacteria and viruses, which cause foodborne illnesses and can be life threatening, are everywhere. As a result, start your preserving tasks with a clean kitchen.

Follow these steps:
1. Clean counters, sinks or utensils with soap and warm water. Rinse thoroughly.
2. Spray the rinsed surfaces with one of the following sanitizers.
   • Add 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach to 1 quart warm water in a spray bottle.
   • Add heated (130°F) undiluted hydrogen peroxide (3%) to a spray bottle.
   • Add heated (130°F) undiluted white vinegar (5% acidity) to a spray bottle.
3. Let air dry.

Learn more about the Ohio State University research using bleach, hydrogen peroxide and vinegar as sanitizers http://bit.ly/Tt1fbV.

Sterilize Jars or Not Sterilize Jars

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, it is not necessary to pre-sterilize clean jars IF you are processing the jars 10 minutes or more in a boiling water bath canner or in the pressure canner. If you are processing jars LESS THAN 10 MINUTES (e.g. jams, jellies, pickles, etc.), sterilize the jars by submerging them in boiling water for 10 minutes.

To Heat or Not to Heat

For many years, we were told to heat lids to soften the sealing compound. Today, Ball® home economists are saying that heating is optional. Wash the lids and set aside until you are ready to put them on filled jars. Today, Ball® does not include directions for heating lids on the box. If you want to continue to heat lids, it is okay. Keep them in water below boiling.
Taking Your Pickles to the Next Level – From Home Canning to Commercial Production
July 14, 2014

If you make the best dill pickles, your friends rave about your BBQ sauce or jalapeno jelly, your salsa is a hot seller at the farmers’ market—plan to attend this workshop!

If you’ve wondered how to get your product on the shelf at your local grocery store—this workshop is for you!

If you have questions on Minnesota requirements for a commercial kitchen, food license, labeling, and more—we look forward to seeing you at this workshop!

DATE: Monday, July 14, 2014
TIME: 1:00–4:30 pm
WHERE: Cabela’s, Rogers, MN
COST: $20.00
PRESENTERS:
Agricultural Utilization Research Institute-AURI: Michael Sparby and Charon Wadhawan
Minnesota Department of Agriculture: Marion Hinnenkamp
University of Minnesota Extension: Deb Botzek-Linn
Minnesota Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association: Marilyn Johnson
REGISTRATION: MFVGA – Marilyn Johnson
Phone: 763-434-0400 mfvga@msn.com

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I make jam from frozen fruit?
Yes. Before freezing, measure the fruit. Many fruits collapse as they thaw and may create an inaccurate measure. Jams and jellies from frozen fruit and juice are better if no sugar is added to the fruit and juice before freezing. When freezing fruit for jelly or jams, use 1/4 under-ripe and 3/4 ripe fruit.

Thaw frozen fruit in the refrigerator until only a few ice crystals remain. Follow jam directions and proportions of fruit (measured before freezing), to pectin and sugar. Thaw frozen juice in the refrigerator overnight. Measure juice and use it immediately in jelly recipe.

The best frozen fruits for jams and jellies are blueberries, currants, and rhubarb.

My canned peaches rise to the top of the jar, why?
Apricots, peaches, berries and rhubarb are naturally buoyant due to air in the cells. To control floating: Use ripe fruit. Pack fruit snugly tight and then add liquid. After filling, remove air bubbles by running a plastic spatula around the inside the jar. Use a regular mouth jar to help keep fruit from floating. Hot packed fruit simmered 2-5 minutes prior to packing will have less air, less floating. Heavy sugar syrup prevents floating. Over processing fruit makes the fruit lighter causing floating.

Where do I find information for selling pickled asparagus at our farmers’ market?
At the Minnesota Department of Agriculture website - Pickle Bill Factsheet at:
http://bit.ly/1ldhrUX

For more food safety information visit our website: extension.umn.edu/food-safety.

If you would like to stop receiving the Home Food Preservation newsletter, please email schmi374@umn.edu.