



# Food Preservation

By Diane Whitten

There's nothing more rewarding than producing your own food for self-sufficiency and health. A large garden can produce so much, that when the summer's bounty is ready to be harvested there can be more than one family can consume before it spoils. Food preservation is an essential skill that will help you enjoy your harvest throughout the year.

Canning, freezing and drying are the three main methods of preserving food. There are two safe ways of canning, depending on the type of food being canned. Acidic foods, such as tomatoes and fruit, can be preserved using the boiling water or the new steam canning methods. Vegetables which have a low acid level must be preserved using the pressure canning method. Canning does take quite a bit of equipment and special jars, but once it's done the food is shelf stable and can be stored in the pantry. If you have extra freezer space, freezing is a quick and easy way to preserve fruits and vegetables. Drying, one of the oldest forms of food preservation, is a good option for long-term storage. Fermentation, another ancient form of food preservation, can extend the shelf life of produce four to six month, long enough to get you through the long winter months.

## Cooperative Extension – Best Bet for Home Food Preservation Instructions

Food preservation instructions change over the years as we learn safer and more effective ways to preserve food. Food preservation instructions are researched and updated by the USDA which then passes the latest information on to Cooperative Extension. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension is the direct link to the USDA through its National Center for Home Food Preservation accessible on line at [www.uga.edu/nchfp](http://www.uga.edu/nchfp).

There is a wealth of information at this site from basic food preservation “how to”, such as How to Use a Canner, to over 185 specific recipes that are guaranteed to be safe. Since botulism food poisoning can occur in low acid canned foods, it's vital that you use a safe, tested recipe to keep your family safe.

## Local Cooperative Extension Resources

Of course, there is nothing like a hands-on demonstration class to learn home food preservation techniques and build confidence in your skills. Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany and Saratoga Counties offer food preservation classes. Check the Events page on their web sites for upcoming classes.

## Just Do It

If you're new to food preservation you can start with freezing, the easiest, least intimidating method. Berries can be placed on a tray in the freezer until frozen then packed in a plastic bag or container. For vegetables just blanch for the number of minutes suggested for the product you're freezing, cool quickly in an ice bath and freeze.

Don't waste your gardening effort by discarding produce you can't consume, just preserve it!

