

## **Food Preservation-August 2009**

It is the time of year when the food preservation calls start rolling into Extension Offices. Many people are growing their own food in home gardens and need to know what to do with the plentiful harvest to store it for use throughout the year. Others are purchasing fruits and vegetables at their peak and preserving them for use throughout the year.

Home canning and food preservation requires using current, tested recommendations and the right equipment. While most of the time, I am all about creativity in the kitchen, canning is not the time to be creative. Tested canning recipes take into account the acidity of food products, the thickness of the product, the heat conductivity, and the potential for food poisoning. All canning should be done “by the book” so to speak – and the book shouldn’t be the 1947 cookbook of your Grandmother’s. What book should you use? There is a cookbook called, “So Easy to Preserve?” that is authored by Dr. Elizabeth Address and Dr. Judy Harrison from the University of Georgia. They are among the leading researchers in home food preservation in the United States. The book, which can be found by typing “So Easy to Preserve” in your Internet search engine, costs \$18 and is a wonderful resource for anyone who does an abundant amount of home canning, freezing or drying. The latest Ball Blue Book has tested recipes, as well. Beware, however, that not all cookbooks follow recommended guidelines. I have a beautiful, hardcover cookbook on food preservation that was published recently that I keep as a bad example. While the full-color photographs are beautiful, the canning instructions are horrid and you could wind up with a bulk batch of botulism if you used the recipes.

If you do not want to buy a book and want a free resource, you can access nine new Extension MontGuides with detailed information on home food preservation for many kinds of food.

The factsheets provide detailed instructions and step-by-step processes for making jam and jelly; drying and freezing fruits and vegetables; canning pickles, sauerkraut, meat, poultry and fish; processing in a pressure canner; and home-canning pressures and processing times. The factsheets include the elevation of county seats across the state of Montana, so that consumers can choose the appropriate processing time and pressure for their altitudes. The MontGuides follow the research-based United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) food preservation guidelines to help prevent potential food-borne illnesses and food spoilage caused by bacteria and molds, which can grow in improperly home-preserved foods. The Montguides can be found on-line at [www.msuextension.org](http://www.msuextension.org) or can be obtained by calling your local county extension office.

Also in Teton County, all the libraries have copies of the “So Easy to Preserve” DVDs that are a great resource for anyone – novice and experienced canners alike can learn a great deal by view the videos.

If you are having challenges with food preservation and want help troubleshooting a problem, you can call the Extension Office. We have a wide network of agents and resources to answer your food preservation questions. In Teton County, we also offer free testing of dial gauges for pressure canners. It takes about 15 minutes to test a gauge. You can call ahead to make an appointment or drop off your gauge to be tested.

Another opportunity to learn about how to use your summer produce is by taking a class from the GROWChoteau group on August 22 at 10 a.m. at the Rocky Mountain Front Farmer’s Market. The GROWChoteau group was an off-shoot from the Choteau Horizons program and has a number of volunteers who are dedicated to helping mentor, train and coach people who are growing their own food. They have given a number of classes through the Farmer’s Market and will be offering suggestions for dealing with your harvest on August 22.

We are fortunate to have abundant resources to help with your abundant produce harvest.