

Preserving Food at Home

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Growing and preserving your own food lets you enjoy delicious, locally grown fruits and vegetables throughout the year. Even if you don't have time or land to grow your own food, Carroll County fruit and vegetable growers offer a wide variety of high quality produce at roadside stands, farmers' markets, and pick-your-own operations.

The advantages of preserving food at home include supporting local agriculture, taking advantage of the abundance of high quality produce, preserving food within hours of picking, and having control over the ingredients. The tradeoff for these advantages is the time and effort to preserve food at home and the cost of equipment.

There are three main methods of preserving food: canning (includes pickling and jellied products), freezing, and drying. Which method you choose will depend on the characteristics of the food you want to preserve and whether there is a tested and safe method of preserving it.

Whether you consider yourself an expert or novice food preserver, you can save time, effort, and money by following these four important steps as you plan ahead this summer.

1. *Plan carefully **before** you begin to preserve food at home.* Time invested before you begin will save you time and money later. UNH Cooperative Extension has been providing information about preserving food at home for more than 90 years. Call UNH Cooperative Extension at 539-3331 or 1-800-322-4166 with your questions before you begin preserving food. Many times callers ask questions while in the middle of the process and find they can't alter the recipe.
2. *Use only up-to-date tested recipes and methods.* This is an important step. Preserving food safely at home is an evolving science. Recipes and methods are constantly updated based on current research. Unsafe methods of canning include using an "open-kettle" method (no processing after jars are filled), steam canning, and using the oven to seal jars.
3. *Gather all your ingredients and equipment.* Make sure you have everything you need on hand so you can work quickly and efficiently. Inspect equipment and replace as needed. UNH Cooperative Extension does check dial-gauges on pressure canners for accuracy.

4. *Follow recipes and directions precisely.* Tested recipes are based on precise amounts of ingredients and procedures. For some preservation methods, altering either can affect the quality and safety of the final product. Adjustments in processing time may have to be made for canning in altitudes of 1,000 feet or above.

For resources, recipes, fact sheets and answers to your food preservation questions, call UNH Cooperative Extension at 539-3331 or 1-800-322-4166, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm. The most frequently requested food preservation fact sheets, include pickles, jams & jellies, tomato and tomato products, and freezing fruit and vegetable charts.

For information online visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/>. This comprehensive website features research-based information, publications, recipes, methods, and links for most food preservation methods.

Preserving food at home is a rewarding way to capture the taste of New Hampshire grown fruits and vegetables to enjoy all year long!

UNH Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer, “Helping You Put Knowledge and Research to Work.” Visit the UNH Cooperative Extension web site at <http://extension.unh.edu> for more information on a variety of food safety issues.

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