UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

STORING GARDEN PRODUCE

By Ellen Rondina, Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Resources,
UNH Cooperative Extension, Strafford County

Many fruits and vegetables can be canned, pickled, dried or frozen. Another option is to store them fresh. Consider this information.

To wash, or not to wash? Even the experts disagree when giving advice on washing garden produce. Some tell you not to wash before storage, and some will tell you to wash off any garden dirt before bringing produce into the home. At issue is this: if you bring in fresh produce loaded with garden dirt, you may also bring pathogenic microorganisms into your kitchen. However, if you wash your produce before storage, it may mold and rot more quickly. If you choose to wash fruits and vegetables before storing, be sure to dry them **thoroughly** with a clean paper towel.

- The temperature of the wash water can affect the safety of some fruits and vegetables. If the water is much colder than the produce, pathogens may be pulled into fruits or vegetables through the stem or blossom end. So, when washing produce fresh from the warm outdoors, the rinse water should not be more than 10 degrees colder than the produce.
- If you are washing refrigerated produce, use cold water. If you choose to store without washing, shake, rub or brush off any garden dirt with a paper towel or soft brush while still outside.
- Never wash berries until you are ready to eat them.
- Store fresh produce in plastic bags or containers so they don't contaminate other foods in the refrigerator.
- Keep fruit and vegetable bins clean. Fruits and vegetables needing refrigeration can be stored at 40° F or less.
- If your refrigerator has a fruit and vegetable bin, use that, but be sure to store fresh produce away from (above) raw meats, poultry or fish.

Additional Storing Tips

- **Tomatoes** are very sensitive to freezing. They should be covered with tarps or blankets during a light frost. When weather permanently turns cold, fruits should be picked, and then allowed to ripen indoors. Fruits should be light green or have some hint of red. Tomatoes picked too green may rot. Temperatures near 70 F are ideal for faster ripening, but temperatures near 55 F will delay ripening for up to a month. Tomatoes stored below this temperature will develop a bland or off flavor. Additionally, stored tomatoes may shrivel in low humidity before ripening. To prevent this, place a layer of fruit in a box and cover it with wax paper. Another layer can be placed on top of the first and covered with more wax paper. Place the lid on the box when finished. Another option is to wrap each tomato individually. Remove tomatoes as they ripen. Placing a banana in the box and allowing it to ripen in proximity to the tomatoes may also speed ripening.
- **Winter squash** are another vegetable commonly stored. They are ripe when the skins develop an apparent waxy coating and cannot be damaged easily by scratching the outer skin with a fingernail. However, unless you are going to immediately consume the squash, fruit should be left attached until the vines have mostly been killed by frost. Leave some stem on the fruit when it is picked. Store winter squash at temperatures ranging from 50 to 60 F at relatively low humidity.
- **Onions** should be harvested when the tops start to fall over. They should be lifted from the ground and stored in a well-ventilated area. When the necks turn brown and they "rustle when disturbed," they are ready to be stored. Shelf life is maximized when the bulbs are stored at low humidity and near freezing. Many factors influence shelf life including variety and whether the bulbs were grown from seeds or sets. Bulbs should be checked periodically.
- **Potatoes** are another crop commonly stored for later use. They should be harvested after the vines start to die. Cure potatoes at 50 to 60 F at relatively high humidity for two weeks. After this, store tubers near 50 F. Lower temperatures may cause an off flavor to develop. Warmer temperatures are acceptable, but will decrease storage life.
- Other crops such as apples, pears, cabbage, celery, carrots and parsnips can be stored for an extended period of time.

The following fact sheets were used to create this article, and can be accessed online, and provide additional useful information.
http://www.ext.colostate.edu/Pubs/Garden/07601.html.
http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/FN_502.pdf.
http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001094_Rep1367.pdf

Four steps to success

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.

1. *Plan carefully **before** you begin to preserve food at home*. Time invested before you begin your project will save you time later.
2. *Use only up-to-date tested recipes and methods (see resources below).* This is an important step. Preserving food safely at home is an evolving science. Recipes and methods are constantly updated based on current research.
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.
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.

http://extension.unh.edu/news/timetips.htm, *Catherine Violette, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.*
UNH Cooperative Extension Professor and Specialist, Food and Nutrition

Resources for tested recipes and methods

- **THE UNH Cooperative Extension EDUCATION CENTER and INFO LINE**– 1-877-398-4769, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 2 pm.

  Trained volunteers provide resources, fact sheets and answer your food preservation questions.

- National Center for Home Food Preservation
  This is a comprehensive website featuring research-based information, publications, recipes, methods, and links for most food preservation methods.
- Pennsylvania State University – *Let's Preserve* Fact Sheets
  The *Let's Preserve* Fact Sheet Series includes tested recipes and methods for canning 15 fruits and vegetables.