PRESERVING THE HARVEST

Preserving local foods in your home is a great way to continue eating locally throughout the winter months. Foods preserved at home are usually less expensive and much tastier than those purchased at the store. Home food preservation also provides an outlet for surplus farm and garden produce.

Freezing food is probably the most common and easiest method of food preservation in this country. Freezing maintains the vitamin content of food better than most other preserving methods. Many people feel that freezing food best sustains the original flavor and texture of food, too.

With the exception of peppers, tomatoes, cooked pumpkin or squash, onions and herbs, all vegetables need to be blanched before freezing. Blanching stops enzymatic action in vegetables and prevents off-flavors, discoloration, destruction of nutrients, and toughness. Blanching involves heating the vegetable briefly in either boiling water or steam.

Dehydration is one of the most time, energy and cost-efficient methods of food preservation. It is estimated that dehydrating costs less than canning and is ¼ the cost of freezing. Dehydrated foods are easy to store since they shrink in size and are lighter in weight. A negative impact of dehydration is that significant amounts of vitamins A and C can be lost in the drying process.

Cold storage of winter vegetables is a wonderful option in states that get colder weather. Storing root crops, onions, garlic, and squashes in a cool environment is the easiest and most time and cost effective storage method available. When stored properly, the food retains its original taste and nutritional value. Even under optimal conditions, though, a small percentage of cold storage produce will spoil at some point. It is important to periodically check cold storage produce and remove spoiled foods.

When compared with other methods of home food preservation, canning falls somewhere in the middle in terms of cost and vitamin loss. Water bath canning is the method used for most fruits, high acid tomato varieties, and salsa. Pressure canning is necessary for low acid vegetables and for canning meat. In order to make low acid foods safe, the clostridium botulinum bacteria, which is found in soil and food grown in soil, must be destroyed.

Pickling is one of the oldest known forms of preserving food. There are many different types of products that can be pickled, including fermented items such as sauerkraut and “deli” dills; fresh pack dill pickles; whole fruits (pears, peaches, watermelon rinds) simmered in a spicy, sweet-sour syrup; and chopped seasoned fruits and vegetables made into relishes.

Source: From Asparagus to Zucchini, page 189-193, by Lauri McKean.
MASTER GARDENERS
DEDICATE BENCH IN MEMORY
OF FORMER MEMBER

On June 29, 2010, the Kirksville Area Master Gardeners met to dedicate a memorial bench in memory of former Master Gardener and Garden n’ Grow volunteer, Sherri Corbett. Sherri passed away in 2005 from cancer. She was an active member of the Kirksville club and spent hours of her time helping with the Garden n’ Grow program, which at that time was known as Junior Master Gardeners. The bench was placed in the garden behind the Adair County Extension Center, a place where Sherri spent a lot of her time working with children. A name plate with her name, date of birth and date of death was placed on the bench.

TOMATOES AND TOMATILLOS

Seasonal eaters and gardeners alike wait impatiently for the first ripe tomato of the season. We love tomatoes in this country, although along with the English we were the last to accept the tomato as edible. We now produce more than two billion pounds of tomatoes annually and import another 700-800 million pounds from Mexico. Only potatoes are produced in higher quantities in the United States.

Thousands of varieties of tomatoes are known, and hundreds actually cultivated. The commercial tomato industry tends to utilize newer hybrids genetically selected traits like sphere shape (to pack into boxes efficiently), thick skin, (to survive mechanical harvesting and shipping), slow ripening (for picking green and gassing with ethylene when redness is desired). Smaller, local market growers choose varieties that emphasize flavor, disease resistance, and nutritional content. Popular types include the cherry tomato, known for its tangy sweetness; the paste or roma, a meatier tomato famous for its role in sauce; the versatile slicer; and the low acid yellow and orange varieties.

The word tomato derives from the ancient Mayan word “xtomatl”. Native to Peru, the tomato was first cultivated by the Aztecs and Incas in the 8th century. It wasn’t until the 16th century that the tomato was first introduced in Europe, via Spanish explorers. The Italians were the first Europeans to begin eating the tomato, followed by the Spanish and French. It wasn’t globally accepted as a food until about 1850.

Enjoy fresh, vine-ripened tomatoes while they last, as tomatoes are very cold sensitive.

The tomatillo, or husk tomato, is a little-known or utilized vegetable in this country. It is, however, important in authentic Mexican cooking, and is best known for its central role in a delicious salsa verde, or green salsa. The perfect blend of tomatillos, garlic, onion, hot chili pepper, lime juice, and fresh cilantro will send most anyone running to find another bag of tortilla chips…….or cold drink!

Tomatillos belong to the solanaceae family, along with close garden relatives the tomato, pepper, and eggplant. Like these vegetables, tomatillos thrive in hot, humid weather. If the heat of summer is adequate, the tomatillo plant will expand rapidly, blossom, and produce prolific quantities of fruit. During much of its growth, the tomatillo look like a small, firm green tomato covered by a loose-fitting papery husk. They are generally harvested as they fill out the husk completely. As one might guess, tomatillos are native to Central and South America where they have been cultivated for centuries, even before the tomato.

Source: From Asparagus to Zucchini, page 152 and 154.
YELLOW NUTSEDGE COMMON IN LAWNS THIS SUMMER

Yellow Nutsedge is a common weed found in many home lawns. The color, growth habit, and rapid growth rate make yellow nutsedge a prominent distraction in the aesthetics of high quality lawns. In addition to home lawns, this weed is also a significant problem in the turfgrass areas of parks, industrial grounds, athletic fields, and golf courses.

Yellow nutsedge is distinctive and relatively easy to identify. The stems are erect, triangular-shaped and yellow-green in color. The leaves are also yellow-green, wide (0.38 to 0.50 inch) bladed with a thick mid-vein and a very waxy covering. The shallow, fibrous root system often produces many nut-like tubers, which are underground food storage organs. Each of these tubers can germinate and produce new plants. Each new plant can also produce rhizomes which can give rise to additional new plants.

Yellow nutsedge is a warm season perennial plant. The above ground foliage does not survive winters in Missouri. As soils warm during the late spring and early summer period, germination of tubers and seed produced by plants from previous years are capable of producing new yellow nutsedge plants. Heavy infestations of this weed in lawns and other turfgrass areas usually become readily apparent in July and August.

Unlike most lawn weeds, yellow nutsedge is not controlled with applications of traditional annual grass weed or broadleaf weed control products. This weed is a member of the sedge family and requires the use of very specific herbicides to achieve satisfactory control. Regardless of the control strategy selected, the plan should be initiated when the weeds are young and immature. Eradication from lawns, although difficult, can be accomplished through the following approaches.

If only a few plants are present, hand-pulling is the most effective way to control it. Begin pulling as soon as the plants are observed. Where large patches of nutsedge are present, control through the use of herbicides may be the only satisfactory option. Sedgehammer containing the active ingredient halosulfuron is recommended. You may have to go to a chemical supplier or farm supply store to find it or have it ordered.

Homeowners should make note of the control strategies that are successful. Because of the seed and tubers that remain in the soil, repeat infestations in subsequent years should be anticipated.

PICKING BLUEBERRIES AND MAKING SALSA

Like many of you, I had the opportunity to pick fresh blueberries this summer at Lost Branch Blueberry Farm east of Kirksville. It is nice to have a u-pick blueberry farm in our region. It is fun to go out and pick berries and visit with others that are there doing the same. A Master Gardener picking while I was there, said “picking blueberries is addictive,” and it sure is. I picked 10 pounds and could have picked more.

The Price family, owners of Lost Branch Blueberry Farm, shared their blueberry salsa recipe with me, and it sure is yummy! Someone asked me to share it in my newsletter for others to try. They did not give me the exact measurements, just the ingredients needed: blueberries—chopped in a chopper or pureed, a can of black beans, chopped cilantro, corn and a few spoonfuls of regular salsa. Mix it all together and enjoy with tortilla chips.
AUGUST GARDENING TIPS

Ornamentals
- Deadhead annuals and perennials as needed.
- Continue spraying roses that are susceptible to black spot and other fungal diseases. Roses should receive no further nitrogen fertilizer after August 15th.
- Divide bearded iris now. Replant so tops of rhizomes are just above ground level.
- Prune to shape hedges for the last time this season.
- Evergreens can be planted/transplanted now to ensure good rooting before winter. Water the plant & planting site several days before moving.
- Soak shrubs periodically during dry spells with enough water to moisten the soil to a depth of 8-10 inches.
- Once bagworms reach full size, insecticides are ineffective. Pruning off and burning large bags provides better control.
- Spray black locust trees to protect against damage by the locust borer.
- Watch Scotch and Austrian pines for Zimmerman pine moth damage. Yellowing or browning of branch tips and presence of pitch tubes near leaf whorls are indicative. Prune and destroy infected parts.
- Hummingbirds are migrating through gardens now.
- Monitor plants for spider mite activity. Hose these pests off with a forceful spray of water.
- Second generation pine needle scale crawlers may be present on Mugo pine now.

Vegetables
- Compost or till under residues from harvested crops.
- Broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower transplants should be set out now for the fall garden. Sow seeds of beans, beets, spinach, and turnips now for the fall garden. Spinach may germinate better if seeds are refrigerated for one week before planting. Begin planting lettuce and radishes the last 2 weeks of August.
- Cure onions in a warm, dry place for 2 weeks before storing.
- Pinch the growing tips of gourds once adequate fruit set is achieved. This directs energy into ripening fruits, rather than vine production.

Fruit
- Prop up branches of fruit trees that are threatening to break under the weight of a heavy crop.
- Thornless blackberries are ripening during the first week of August.
- Spray peach and other stone fruits to protect against peach tree borers.
- Sprays will be necessary to protect late peaches from oriental fruit moth damage.
- Cultivate strawberries. Weed preventers can be applied immediately after fertilizing.
- Watch for fall webworm activity now.

Turfgrass
- Apply insecticides now for grub control on lawns being damaged by their activity.
- Lawns scheduled for renovation this fall should be killed with Roundup. Have soil tested to determine fertility needs.
- During the last week in August, dormant lawns should be soaked to encourage strong fall growth. —Missouri Botanical Garden—

UPCOMING EVENTS

August 2: Fabius Master Gardener club mtg., 7 pm, Presbyterian Church, Memphis.
August 3: Heartland Master Gardener meeting; Brookfield.
August 3: Salt River Master Gardener mtg, 7 pm, Mack Ellis, NRCS, “Missouri Wild Flowers”, location TBD.
August: Sullivan County Master Gardener meeting.
August 10: Magic City Master Gardener meeting.
August 17: Kirksville Area Master Gardeners meeting and harvest dinner; 6:30 pm.
August 26-Nov. 11: Master Gardener training classes, 1-4 pm, Kirksville TCRC. Call 660-665-9866 to register.
September: Tomato Festival, Bradford Research Farm, Columbia.
September 15: Fruit Grower tour and vineyard project at Truman Farm. The blueberry farm will be on the tour. Lunch will be provided and pre-registration is required. No cost to attend. Watch for details in the September newsletter and emails. Plans will be finalized for this tour by mid-August.
September 18: NEMO Food Fest; 9:00-12:00, Kirksville Square. Talent show for kids 8-18; prizes awarded. Call the Schuyler Co. Extension office at 660-457-3469 for details.