For the sweetest peaches, look for locally grown peaches that ripened on the tree. Unfortunately, this year’s harsh winter has reduced the local peach crop. Most buds froze and many trees didn’t bloom well. Therefore, a little searching may be necessary to find the juiciest local peach.

Popular local peach varieties include: Redhaven, Loring, Cresthaven, Jim Dandee and Elberta. A new, novelty peach is the donut peach, a yellow or white flattened variety that is easy to prepare.

Selection. For best quality, select peaches that are firm to slightly soft and free from bruises. The best sign of ripeness in a peach is a creamy or golden undertone, often called “ground color.” The rosy “blush” on a peach is not a good indicator of ripeness and differs from one variety to the next. Fresh peach fragrance also indicates ripeness. Avoid peaches with a green ground color as they lack flavor and usually shrivel and become tough rather than ripen. Peaches that are picked green may develop more juice, but they will not become sweeter. Missouri peaches are available tree ripened and sweet. Choose:

- Slightly under-ripe peaches for pickling
- Firm-ripe peaches for canning and drying
- Fully-ripe peaches for freezing or eating fresh
- Very ripe peaches without any signs of mold or rot, for making sweet spreads.

Most peaches grown today are freestone (woody pit falls out easily when fruit is cut in half). In contrast, the fruit of clingstone must be cut off the fruit’s pit. Early varieties tend to be clingstone, while later peaches tend to be freestone.

Canning peaches. Choose ripe and mature fruit of ideal quality. If harvesting, allow peaches to ripen one or more days between harvest and canning.

Quantity. For each 7-quart canner load, use about 17-1/2 pounds of fresh peaches. For each 9-pint canner load, use an average of 11 pounds of fresh peaches. A bushel weighs 48 pounds and yields 16 quarts to 24 quarts—an average of 2-1/2 pounds per quart.

(Cont’d on page 2)
Pleasing peaches (Cont’d from cover page)

Peaches can be packed in syrup (very light, light or medium), water, apple juice or white grape juice. If packing in light syrup, combine 4-3/4 cups of water with 1 cup of sugar. Bring to a boil to dissolve sugar.

To peel peaches, dip peaches in boiling water for 30-60 seconds until the skin loosens. Quickly dip peaches in an ice bath and slip off skins. Cut peaches in half and remove pits. Slice peaches if desired.

Hold peaches in an anti-darkening solution of ascorbic acid and water. Follow instructions on packages of commercial ascorbic acid to prepare anti-darkening solution, or combine one teaspoon of ascorbic acid per one gallon of water. If using tablets, crush thoroughly.

Hot pack. Remove peaches from anti-darkening solution and drain thoroughly. Heat fruit and syrup in a large saucepan, bring to a boil. Pack hot fruit and syrup in jars leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Pack with cut side down. Remove air bubbles and wipe jar rims. Adjust lids and process in a boiling water bath for 20 minutes for pints and 25 minutes for quarts at 0-1,00 feet of altitude. At 1,001 -3,000 feet of altitude, increase processing time to 25 minutes for pints and 30 minutes for quarts in a boiling water bath canner.

Freezing peaches. Choose well-ripened fruit and handle with care to avoid bruising fruit. Sort, wash and peel. Peeling without boiling water leads to a better end product when freezing.

For a syrup pack, use 40% syrup. Add 1/2 teaspoon of ascorbic acid per quart of syrup for a better product. Starting with 1/2 cup of syrup per pint, put peaches directly into cold syrup. Press fruit down and continue to add syrup to cover fruit. Leave headspace of 1/2-inch per pint and 1-inch per quart. Place a small piece of crumpled water-resistant paper on top to hold fruit down, seal and freeze.

For a sugar pack, add 2/3 cup of sugar to each quart (1-1/3 pounds) of prepared peaches and stir gently until the sugar has dissolved. Let stand for 15 minutes. To prevent darkening fruit, mix 1/4 teaspoon ascorbic acid with 3 tablespoons of water and sprinkle over fruit before adding sugar. Pack into containers, seal and freeze.

Source: GH1502, Quality for Keeps: Freezer Fruits [link]
GH1455, Quality for Keeps: Food Preservation—Fruitful Canning [link]

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New products aid in herb harvesting and storing

Some new items have hit the shelves recently that will aid in harvesting, storing and preserving fresh herbs.

The Ball® 5-Blade Herb Scissors are designed to make quick work of harvesting fresh herbs. The five blade design works well for slicing herbs such as basil, parsley and cilantro. Chives can also be chopped with this gadget.

The Ball® Fresh Herb Keeper offers an alternative way to store fresh herbs in the refrigerator. This design keeps the stems and roots of herbs in water when closed.

Ball® Frozen Herb Starters are BPA free, flexible, silicone trays with lids that work for freezing herbs. For freezing in these trays, herbs are placed in water and frozen and take on an ice cube shape. The silicone design allows for easy removal.

Disclaimer: University of Missouri presents this information for education purposes only. It neither endorses nor rejects these products.
Smooth cook-top alternatives

Canning on a smooth cook-top can cause many issues. The cook-top itself may be damaged due to discoloration or even cracking of glass tops. Canned products may be under processed in canner if the stove contains an automatic shut-off when temperatures become too high.

It is highly recommended to check manufacturer’s instructions to determine if smooth cook-tops are safe for canning. If manufacturer’s instructions specify that the cook-top is not suitable for canning, several options can be tried to can at home. The first alternative would be to install a separate, permanent range-top with electric or gas coils (without the oven). This option can be expensive, would require adequate space in the kitchen, and would require proper utility connections.

A more affordable option would be the purchase of portable electric or gas coil burners. Not all portable burners are appropriate for canning. Before buying or using a portable burner for canning, check the manufacturer’s information or contact customer service department to determine if burner is suitable for canning.

If purchasing a portable burner, consider these tips:

- Choose a burner that is level, sturdy and secure. Proper airflow should occur under burner, but burner should not sit too high, which would cause it to be unsteady with a full canner on it.
- Canner should not have a diameter that is 4 inches more than burner. In other words, canner should not extend more than 2 inches from burner on any side. This is a common recommendation for canning on any gas or electric burner.
- If purchasing an electric burner, wattage should be equivalent to that of a household range burner. The National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) has successfully tested a boiling water canner on a burner that is about 1500W/120V, but household burners are usually around 1750W or higher. This higher wattage would actually be better if available. No testing has been tried yet with a pressure canner on a portable electric burner.
- The housing unit of burner should be able to hold up to the high heat under canner for long periods of time, without causing damage to counter tops from reflected heat. While doing research, the NCHFP contacted a restaurant supply store and found a burner costing around $150. During their testing, they use the burner to boil water, but have not yet used it for canning repeatedly.
- There is currently at least one pressure canner manufacturer that advises against canning on an outdoor gas burner/gas range burner over 12,000 BTU’s. Pressure canners can be damaged if the burner gives off too much heat. The recommended come-up time for pressure canning can also be altered if the burner puts out too much heat, which can lead to an unsafe product.

If uncertain about canning on a portable burner, read the manufacturer’s guide with your canner or get in touch with the customer service department. Be sure to specify whether you are wanting to pressure can or use a boiling water bath canner.

Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation Blog. Preserving Food at Home http://preservingfoodathome.com/2014/05/06/do-you-have-a-smooth-cooktop-and-still-want-to-can-at-home/
Peach Jelly with Powdered Pectin

- 3 cups peach juice (about 3-1/2 pounds peaches and 1/2 cup water)
- 5 cups sugar
- 1/2 cups lemon juice
- 1 box powdered pectin

Procedure: To prepare juice – Choose fully-ripe peaches. Wash and slice or chop. Do not remove pits or peels. Crush fruit. Add crushed fruit and 1/2 cup water to a saucepan. Cover, bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Fruit should be soft. Do not overcook.

To extract juice – Pour contents of saucepan into a damp jelly bag and suspend the bag to drain the juice. The clearest jelly comes from juice that is allowed to drip without pressing or squeezing. If juice is extracted through a fruit press, it should be restrained through a jelly bag.

To make jelly – Sterilize canning jars. Measure sugar and set aside. Place peach juice, lemon juice and powdered pectin in a large saucepot. Bring to a full boil stirring constantly.

Stir in sugar all at once. Bring back to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat and quickly skim foam from the top of the jelly. Pour jelly into hot canning jars, leave 1/4-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process 5 minutes* in a boiling water bath.

*Processing times vary based on altitude.

Source: “So Easy to Preserve,” fifth edition, Elizabeth Andress, PhD, Judy A. Harrison, PhD, Cooperative Extension/The University of Georgia/Athens.