Kitchen Efficiency & Food Preservation

Mastery

Welcome to the Kitchen Efficiency & Food Preservation Mastery Guide!

This guide provides a wealth of information, and my sincere hope is that you'll not just read through the guide but *take action*—because the true transformation happens when you put these skills into practice in your own kitchen.

You'll find a breakdown inside this guide that outlines the various focus areas along with places to jot down your own notes and ideas.

It starts with the foundation of a well-stocked pantry and ends with a personalized, *sustainable* system that empowers you to preserve food *consistently* throughout the year.

Here's a quick look at what you can expect:

- Set the stage with the foundational steps to build a homestead pantry that saves you time and money.
- Discover practical strategies to stock that pantry and preserve food without overwhelm—including root cellaring and dehydrating.
- Learn about canning safety and confidence—so you know what *not* to do, as well as how to do it right.
- Dive into fermentation and the tools to start building gut-healthy, probiotic-rich foods at home.
- Discover how to turn everything you've learned into a *preserving rhythm* that fits your life—with bonus quick meal strategies and inspiration.

Whether you are brand new to preserving or looking to get more efficient with your time, you're in the right place. I'm so glad you're here and can't wait to see what you create in your kitchen.

Let's get started!

Blessings and Mason jars,

Melissa K. Norris

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Pantry

Efficient Homestead Cooking and Kitchen Management

Discover practical and effective methods for streamlining your homestead kitchen with this guide. Focusing on the core principles of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and health-conscious cooking, and delve into strategies for managing your pantry, planning meals, and optimizing your cooking processes. By emphasizing the use of real food ingredients and embracing from-scratch cooking, this document empowers you to save time, reduce expenses, and significantly improve your overall well-being.

Stocking the Pantry

A well-stocked pantry is essential for efficient cooking. It doesn't require a vast array of ingredients, but rather a selection of foundational basics.

- **Dry Goods:** Flour (or wheat berries for grinding), grains (oatmeal, rice, dried beans), sugar, sweeteners (honey, maple syrup, etc.), and salt (mineral salt recommended).
- **Fats:** Traditional fat sources like butter, lard, tallow, ghee, coconut oil, and olive oil. Avoid highly processed oils like canola or vegetable oil.
- **Culinary Herbs and Spices:** Buying spices in bulk is more cost-effective than purchasing individual seasoning packets. Stock basics like chili powder, garlic powder, onion powder, cumin, paprika, mustard seeds, turmeric, curry, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and black peppercorns. These can be used to create a variety of seasoning mixes.
- **Vegetables and Fruit:** Have canned or preserved fruits and vegetables on hand for when fresh produce is out of season.
- **Protein Sources:** Include meat, eggs, and dairy in your pantry basics.
- **Other Basics:** Onions, garlic, bone broth, dairy (or dairy alternatives), vinegar, lemon juice, soy sauce/coconut aminos, Worcestershire sauce, and fish sauce.

Meal Planning Made Easy

Effective meal planning saves time and money.

- **Do an Inventory:** Regularly check your pantry, fridge, and freezer to see what you have on hand and what needs to be used up.

- **Plan Around Seasonal/Preserved Foods:** Plan meals around seasonal produce or preserved fruits and vegetables. Buying seasonal items, even at the grocery store, is often cheaper and more nutritious.
- **Pick Theme Nights/Days:** Reduce decision fatigue by assigning themes to certain days of the week (e.g., Taco Tuesdays, Slow Cooker Mondays).

Streamlined Cooking

Efficient workflows in the kitchen save time and energy.

- **Efficient Workflows:** Multitask during meal prep to get more done at once.
- **Master Doughs:** Prepare a large batch of dough that can be stored in the fridge and used for various baked goods throughout the week. This saves time and allows you to master one dough recipe.
- **Batch Cooking:** Dedicate a day (e.g., Sunday) to cook a large protein, double up on sides, and prepare staples for the week (rice, beans, hard-boiled eggs, taco meat, biscuit dough).

Examples for Batch Cooking:

- Cook a whole chicken (or other large protein).
- Cook rice and beans (use broth for rice for added nutrition).
- Hard-boil eggs.
- Prepare taco meat.
- Make a double batch of biscuit dough (some for the meal, some to freeze).

Money and Time-Saving Tools and Techniques

- **Make Bone Broth:** Save bones and vegetable scraps to make nutrient-rich bone broth.
- **Freeze Biscuit Dough:** Freeze extra biscuit dough for quick and easy meals later.
- **Use a Pressure Canner:** Preserve foods for long-term storage and to have shelf-stable options.

With these practical strategies in hand, you're well on your way to transforming your kitchen into an efficient, cost-effective, and health-focused hub of homestead activity. Embrace these techniques to not only streamline your cooking processes but also to cultivate a sustainable and nourishing lifestyle for yourself and your family.

Creative Food Storage Solutions for Small Homes

Living in a smaller home, especially one without a basement or garage, doesn't mean you can't store a significant amount of food. With a little creativity, you can maximize available space and create effective food storage solutions. This document explores various strategies for storing food in small homes, drawing from real-world experience in a manufactured home setting.

Maximizing Kitchen Storage

- **Front Pantry:** Utilize existing kitchen space by creating a "front pantry" area for frequently used items. This can include home-canned goods, oils, vinegars, and smaller quantities of dry goods like pasta and nuts.
- **Cupboard Organization:** Optimize existing kitchen cupboards for storing staples like flour, sugar, spices, and appliances.
- **Repurposed Spaces:** Look for underutilized spaces in the kitchen. A former corner office or TV space can be transformed into shelving for additional food storage.

Transforming Closets into Pantries

- **Shelf Installation:** Convert closets into functional pantries by installing shelves from floor to ceiling. This is particularly effective in closets with vaulted ceilings.
- **Sturdy Shelving:** Ensure shelves are sturdy enough to support the weight of canned goods or other heavy items. Locate wall studs for secure installation.
- **Vertical Space:** Utilize the full height of the closet, including the upper portion, for storage.
- **Hooks for Hanging:** Add hooks for hanging items like garlic or onion braids.
- **Repurposing Closet Space:** Be willing to repurpose closet space entirely for food storage, potentially relocating items like coats and cleaning supplies.

Utilizing Underutilized Areas

- **Under Bed Storage:** Use risers to create more space under beds or slide dry goods and canned goods directly underneath. Store items in boxes or on sheets for easier access.
- **Behind Furniture:** If couches are placed against a wall, utilize the space behind them for long-term food storage. Be cautious with glass jars in this area and consider storing dry goods or metal cans instead.

General Tips for Small Space Food Storage

- **Get Creative:** Think outside the box and identify any potential unused spaces in your home.
- **Vertical Storage:** Maximize vertical space by installing shelving that reaches the ceiling.
- **Sturdy Support:** Ensure all shelving and storage solutions can safely support the weight of the stored items.
- **Accessibility:** Organize items in a way that makes them easily accessible and manageable.
- **Consider Item Type:** Be mindful of the types of food you store in different locations, considering factors like temperature, humidity, and potential movement or disturbance.

By implementing these creative food storage strategies, you can effectively store a significant amount of food, even in a smaller home with limited space.

Stocking Your Pantry with Pantry Staples

In uncertain times, having a well-stocked food supply can provide peace of mind and ensure your family's needs are met. Building a long-term food supply isn't about panic buying; it's about preparedness and self-reliance. Drawing from a rich family history of food preservation rooted in the Great Depression and rural living, this guide offers practical advice and essential staples to help you build your own food storage.

Why Build a Food Supply?

For many, the idea of long-term food storage might seem daunting. However, it's a wise practice that can benefit everyone, regardless of their circumstances. Whether facing natural disasters, supply chain disruptions, or simply wanting to be more self-sufficient, having a food reserve can offer security and stability.

Starting Simple: Grocery Store Options

If you're new to food storage, begin with easy options from your local grocery store. Ready-to-eat meals offer convenience and a decent shelf life. Shelf-stable condiments like soy sauce and curry paste can add flavor and variety to basic staples like rice. Dried beans and lentils are also good short-term options, but it's important to note that they may not last indefinitely without specialized packaging.

Canned goods, such as chicken and various beans, are excellent sources of protein and other nutrients. Pasta and gluten-free alternatives can help stretch meals and provide variety. These items are readily available and can be a great starting point for your food storage journey.

Delving into Long-Term Storage

For those looking to build a more extensive food supply, certain items are essential. White rice, wheat berries, honey, sugar, vinegar, and salt can last for many years when stored correctly. Optimal storage conditions include keeping these items in airtight containers, away from light, heat, and humidity. Oxygen absorbers can also help extend their shelf life.

Honey is a unique food that can last indefinitely, though it may crystallize over time. Simply warming it will return it to its liquid state. Sugar and vinegar also have very long shelf lives when kept dry and sealed.

Freeze-dried foods offer another excellent long-term storage option, with some products lasting up to 25 years. Home-canned goods are also a valuable addition, but it's crucial to follow safe and updated canning procedures to ensure their longevity and safety.

Practical Tips for Building Your Supply

Building a long-term food supply doesn't have to be overwhelming. Here are some practical tips to get you started:

1. **Track Your Consumption:** Start by tracking the foods your family eats regularly. This will help you determine what to prioritize in your storage.
2. **Prioritize Versatile Items:** Focus on items that can be used in multiple dishes and form the basis of meals, such as rice, beans, and grains.
3. **Gradual Accumulation:** Gradually add extra items to your regular grocery purchases. This approach is less overwhelming and more budget-friendly.
4. **Avoid Empty Calories:** While comfort foods like hot cocoa and drink mixes have their place, don't rely solely on them. Prioritize nutrient-dense foods that will provide sustenance.

Where to Buy in Bulk

Buying in bulk is a cost-effective way to build your food supply. Consider these options:

- **Azure Standard:** This online retailer offers a wide variety of bulk items, including organic options, with drop-off locations for convenient pickup.
- **Local Grain Mills and Farms:** Supporting local businesses is a great way to source grains and other staples. Check for grain mills and farms in your area.
- **Online Sources:** Many online retailers offer bulk grains and other food items.
- **Grocery Stores:** Some grocery stores, particularly those with a focus on whole foods, may have bulk sections where you can purchase grains and other items.

Storing Grains for Long-Term Use

When storing grains for the long term, it's important to choose the right type and store them properly. White rice is preferred over brown rice for long-term storage, as brown rice can turn rancid. Hard wheat berry varieties are ideal for baking bread, while soft white wheat is better for pastries and cookies.

Store grains in food-safe buckets or airtight containers with oxygen absorbers, and keep them in a cool, dark, and dry place. Gamma lids can provide an extra layer of protection and make accessing your stored grains easier.

Building a long-term food supply is a proactive step towards self-reliance and security. By starting small, prioritizing versatile items, and storing them properly, you can create a valuable resource that will serve your family well for years to come.

Dehydrating & Root Cellaring

Mastering Home Food Preservation

Home food preservation is a valuable skill that can provide peace of mind, financial savings, and control over the quality of your food. While the process might seem daunting, with the right knowledge and planning, it can be a stress-free and rewarding experience. This guide breaks down the essentials of home food preservation, drawing on expert advice and practical tips.

Addressing Common Fears and Concerns

Many people feel apprehensive about home canning, particularly due to fears of botulism. It's important to remember that following tested and updated procedures is crucial for safety. Understanding the "why" behind each step, not just the "how," can alleviate these fears. Time and energy constraints are also common concerns. Modern conveniences sometimes make us feel busier than ever, but with strategic planning, home food preservation can fit into even a hectic schedule.

Planning is Key

The first step to successful food preservation is planning based on your family's eating habits. Document what your family eats regularly and prioritize those foods for preservation. If you're new to preserving, simply keep a running list of meals and ingredients. If you're already experienced, assess what you have left from last year's harvest and adjust your plans accordingly.

Prioritize and Strategize

Create a preserving list and highlight staple items. Prioritize foods that must be processed fresh, such as cucumbers for pickles. These items can't wait and need immediate attention. For other items like berries or tomatoes, consider freezing them until you have time to process them. This approach allows you to manage the harvest without feeling overwhelmed.

Understanding Different Preservation Methods

There are various methods for preserving food at home, each with its own set of rules and equipment. Note: Canning and Fermenting are not listed below. We'll go into further detail on them later on.

- **Dehydrating:** Removes moisture from food to inhibit bacterial and fungal growth. It can be done using a dehydrator, oven, or even sun-drying. Freeze-drying is a specialized form of dehydration that uses a process called sublimation.

- **Salt Curing:** Draws away moisture and kills microbes. It's commonly used for meat and herbs.
- **Vinegar and Alcohol:** Create acidic environments or inhibit bacteria growth. They're often used for herbs and fruits.
- **Freezing:** A simple method for preserving many foods, including fruits, vegetables, and meats.
- **Root Cellaring:** Uses temperature and humidity levels to prolong the shelf life of specific vegetables like winter squash, onions, and potatoes.

Important Considerations:

- **Safety:** Always follow tested and updated procedures, especially for canning. Botulism is a serious concern, and shortcuts can be dangerous.
- **Equipment:** Invest in quality canning jars and lids. A pressure canner is essential for non-acidic foods. Other equipment, like dehydrators or fermenting crocks, can be helpful but not always necessary.
- **Storage:** Store preserved foods in a cool, dark, and dry place. Proper storage conditions are crucial for maintaining quality and extending shelf life.
- **Versatility:** Focus on preserving versatile items that can be used in multiple dishes.
- **Resources:** Seek out reliable resources for recipes and techniques. Online communities and expert-led courses can provide valuable support and guidance.

Simplifying the Process

Avoid feeling overwhelmed by taking a simple and strategic approach. Start with what your family eats most often and gradually expand your preservation skills. Consider joining a community of like-minded individuals for support and encouragement.

Home food preservation is a valuable skill that offers numerous benefits. By understanding the basics, planning effectively, and prioritizing safety, you can create a well-stocked pantry and enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor all year round.

Dehydrating Equipment

Dehydrating is one of the oldest forms of food preservation, much older than my beloved canning. But it definitely has its place in a homesteading kitchen and food preservation.

Dehydration is removing the moisture or liquid from food so bacteria can't grow in it and so the food can be shelf stable without spoiling. This is done with air and heat.

Ways to Dehydrate

1. Old-fashioned air drying of greens and herbs: hanging up the greens and letting the heat and air do its thing. This is best done with a small bunch of herbs tied together where air can circulate, either a covered porch or even near (but not where it can cause a fire hazard) a wood stove.
2. Your regular oven: if your regular oven temperature goes down to 150° F , you can prop open the oven door for ventilation (make sure children and animals cannot get inside) and use your oven as a dehydrator. Note: I have not tried this method personally.
3. Solar oven: use a solar oven and the power of the sun to dehydrate your food.
4. Electric dehydrators: most people are familiar with these.

What to Look for in a Dehydrator

I prefer a square tray dehydrator (I feel like I can fit more food on it) and one that allows me to select the exact temperature I want. Choose a dehydrator model that has a low temperature of 95° F which is needed for herbs and spices, especially for medicinal herbs to preserve the medicinal properties and get the full potency of the herbs. When dehydrating meat, you will need a dehydrator that can be set at 160° F.

There are several models on the market. I have a Nesco, and it's worked great and extra trays can be added or taken away. The heat in the Nesco model does come from the top of the unit, so you may need to rotate the trays.

Excalibur is considered the high-end model of dehydrators as the air comes from the back of the unit, so you don't have to rotate the trays. Because the air does come from the back, if you are dehydrating lightweight items like herbs or flowers, be careful when opening the unit because all of the lightweight items may be pushed out the front.

I always look for a model that allows you to purchase extra trays and use as many or little as you need. I also like to use silicone mats for dehydrating small items that will fall through the cracks and/or fruit leather.

Equipment and Storage Options

- Food processor: when dehydrating the items should be uniform in size and shape. Also, a food processor is a good option because it saves time prepping. This ensures the items will all dehydrate at the same rate. If you have a difference in thickness, one of your items may be brittle and over dehydrated by the time the other items have reached the point of being shelf stable.
- Handheld vacuum sealer or electric vacuum sealer machine
- Mason jars or glass jars
- Mylar bags

Benefits of Dehydrated Food

Dehydrated food has a very long shelf life, if kept at 70° F or cooler, without oxygen (aka sealed up tight) it will last for approximately 8 to 10 years. Mason jars that are vacuum sealed and Mylar bags will keep dehydrated food shelf stable for years. Vacuum sealed plastic bags, over time do tend to let some oxygen in. For very short-term storage, zip top bags will work for about 1 week. These types of bags are not airtight and will start to absorb moisture from the air.

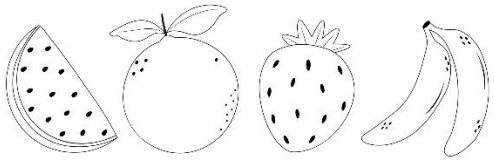
Dehydrated food is very light weight, making it easy to take with you in backpacks, pockets, etc.

Dehydrated food is very small, so if you have limited storage space, you can fit quite a bit of dehydrated food.

Some dehydrated food, think raisins and berries, is eaten in its dehydrated form, meaning no extra work, water, or cooking. (This is not the case for all dehydrated food but works for most fruits.)

Temperatures for Dehydrating Food

Herbs and Spices	95° Fahrenheit/35° Celsius
Nuts and Seeds	105° Fahrenheit/41° Celsius
Fruits and Vegetables	135° Fahrenheit/57 ° Celsius
Fish, Jerky, and Meats	160° Fahrenheit/71° Celsius



Dehydrating Cherries

Preparation

1. Pick or purchase or your cherries with the stems on to make them last longer.
2. Rinse your cherries.
3. Remove the stems and then remove the pits.
4. Place the prepared cherries on a dehydrator tray that is lined with a silicone mat.

Processing

- Set your dehydrator to 130° F. (Ideal temperature for dehydrating fruits.)
- How long? It depends on the liquid content, size of the cherries, humidity and room temperature.
- Usually check the cherries after 24 hours.

Testing and Storage

- How do you know there is enough moisture removed? While the dehydrator is still warm, the cherries must be warm, take a few cherries and place them in either a plastic bag or a Mason jar. Seal them up completely.
- After letting them sit for a while, check to see if there is any condensation or beads of moisture on the jar or the plastic bag.
- If there is condensation or moisture, return the cherries to the tray and dehydrate longer and do another test.
- If you don't see any moisture forming, package the cherries. If you will be using the cherries within a month or so, they can be stored in a canning jar. For longer term storage, they can be vacuum sealed to suck the oxygen out.

Notes

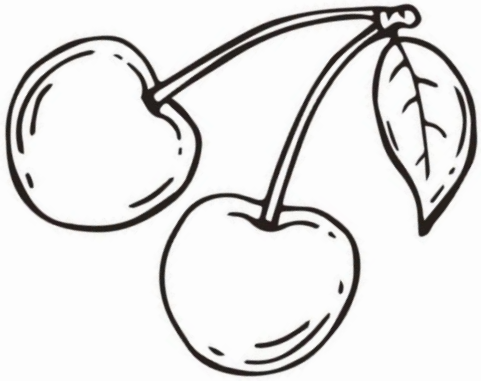
Once the stems are removed from the cherries, oxygen can get in there. This will make the cherries break down faster, turn soft and start to shrivel.

For fruit that tends to have a lot of juice, it is best to line your dehydrator tray with a silicone mat. This helps prevent the fruit from sticking and makes processing and cleanup time faster.

You don't want the cherries crunchy or brittle or when you touch them you don't want them to crumble.

Do not leave dehydrated food sitting out, not packaged, because it will absorb the moisture from the room and the environment.

When storing dehydrated fruit, I don't use oxygen absorbers, especially if I'm not sure it is going to be at least 10% moisture or less. Fruit is acidic, so there it not really a concern about botulism. For dehydrated vegetables, if it's higher than 10% moisture and you use an oxygen absorber, you can run the risk of botulism. Therefore, I don't tend to use oxygen absorbers when it comes to storing my dehydrated fruits or vegetables.



Harvesting & Drying Leather Britches

What Are Leather Britches?

Leather Britches are green beans that have been preserved by stringing and drying, rather than canning, or other forms of preservation.

The great thing about this method of preservation is that you don't have to heat up your house with a pressure canner or even a dehydrator to preserve them safely.

During the Great Depression, my grandmother did can some food, but they had a limited number of jars, so she really had to choose what food went into jars vs. other forms of food preservation that were available to her.

What Beans Make the Best Leather Britches?

Traditionally leather britches were done with a greasy bean, an heirloom bean that is slick without fuzz on the pod. Our Tarheel green pole beans are a greasy variety, but any hardy, non-fuzzy green bean will dry well and make great leather britches. It's best to choose a variety (preferably an heirloom variety) that has thicker skin and larger beans.

But don't let your variety hold you back! Even if you've already planted your beans this year and they're not heirloom or a larger bean variety, give these leather britches a try anyway! Like I always say, *you learn best from doing!*

When To Harvest Beans

When making leather britches you really want to use beans that aren't overripe, they should be the perfect eating stage, tender and crisp when snapped.

How to Make Leather Britches

1. The first thing you'll need to do after harvesting your green beans is to give them a quick rinse, then string them by snapping off one end and pulling the string-like membrane off the bean. Then snap the other end of the bean off.
2. Grab an older sewing needle and a long piece of thread and double thread your needle (the beans can get heavy if doing a long strand). Tie off a large knot at the end of the string (if your knot is too small the beans will just slip right over it.

3. Take a bean and poke the needle through the middle of the bean. I like to poke through one of the actual beans rather than just through the green fleshy part, this will help the beans stay in place.
4. Continue stringing your beans until you have a nice long line of beans. I like to do mine in about 1-2 foot sections, but ultimately, it depends on how many beans you're harvesting at a time for how long your strand will get OR how much your family will eat at one sitting.
5. Make a nice big loop at the top of the string and hang it from a hook where it's out of the way, preferably in a warm, dry, with good air flow area of your home.
6. As the beans dry, they will start to look leathery, hence the name, "Leather Britches".

How to Store Leather Britches

Once your leather britches are completely dry, you can store them in a cool, dark area of your home. A root cellar or dark pantry will do.

How to Braid Garlic

Once you have cured your garlic it's time to prepare them for long-term storage to enjoy the fruits (or bulbs!) of your labor all year. The below steps will walk you through the process of cleaning and preparing your garlic and onions, including how to braid garlic for beautiful and practical storage.

Preparing Your Cured Garlic

Before storing, ensure your garlic are fully cured. They should have been left in a dry, well-ventilated area for several weeks until the necks are dry and the outer skins are papery.

Step 1: Cleaning

- **Remove Excess Dirt:** Gently brush off any loose dirt and debris. Focus on the roots and outer layers. Use a bag or newspaper to catch the debris and keep things tidy. It's easier to do this outside if possible!
- **Trim Roots:** Cut off the root system at the base of the garlic bulb, removing as much dirt as possible.
- **Remove Dirty Outer Layers:** Gently peel off the first few loose, dirty outer layers of the garlic bulb. This reveals cleaner layers underneath. Be careful not to remove too many layers, as you want to protect the cloves.
- **Separate Garlic:** If you have different varieties or sizes of garlic, separate them into piles. This will make braiding easier. NOTE: You do not need to braid garlic to store it.

Braiding Garlic for Storage

Braiding garlic is a great way to store it in a visually appealing and accessible way.

Materials:

- Cured garlic
- Twine or jute string

Instructions:

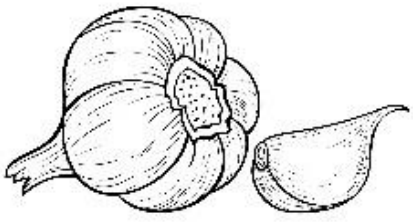
1. **Prepare Twine:** Cut a short piece of twine (about 12-18 inches) and lay it out on your work surface.
2. **Create the Base:** Take three large heads of garlic and place them together at the base. Tie the twine firmly around the necks of the garlic to secure them. This is the base of your braid.

3. **Add Garlic:**
    - Take the next head of garlic and place its stalk in the middle between the existing garlic stalks.
    - Bring the stalk from one side over and into the middle.
    - Repeat with the stalk from the other side, bringing it over and into the middle.
    - Continue this process, adding one head of garlic at a time, always placing the new stalk in the middle and then bringing the side stalks over to meet it.
4. **Maintain Three Sections:** As you add more garlic, try to keep three distinct sections of stalks for braiding. This will make the process easier.
5. **Braiding the Tops:** Once you have added about 12-16 heads of garlic (depending on size), the stalks will become thinner and more pliable. Begin braiding the stalks like you would braid hair.
6. **Tie Off:** When you have braided the tops to your desired length, tie off the end with twine. Wrap the twine around several times for strength and create a loop for hanging.
7. **Trim Excess:** Trim any excess stalks or loose ends to neaten the braid.
8. **Storage:** Hang one braid in your kitchen for easy access. Store the rest of your braids in a cool, dark, and dry pantry or storage area.

Tips for Success

- **Braiding Considerations:** If you have garlic with very thick stalks, it may be harder to braid. Consider trimming the tops of these and storing them in a basket or on a shelf.
- **Sorting by Size:** Sorting your garlic by size before braiding can help create a more even and visually appealing braid.
- **Storage Conditions:** Proper storage is crucial for long-term preservation. Keep garlic and onions in a cool, dark, and dry place with good ventilation.
- **Seed Garlic:** Set aside the largest and healthiest garlic heads for planting next year's crop.
- **Longevity:** Properly stored garlic can last for up to a year or even longer. Onions will also last for several months with good storage practices.

By following these steps, you can ensure your garlic stay fresh and flavorful for months to come, allowing you to enjoy your harvest well into the following year.



How to Cure Garlic & Winter Squash

When cured properly, specific vegetables will last for months, even if you don't have a root cellar or basement.

The chart and info snippet below is shared from my book *The Family Garden Plan: Grow a Year's Worth of Sustainable and Healthy Food*

Crop	Temperature	Humidity	Curing Time	Signs Curing is Finished
Garlic and Onion	68–85 °F (don't exceed 85 °F)	70%	Up to 2 weeks	Outer skins are dry and papery, stems have shrunk and are hard (no green shows when you cut the stems near the neck)
Winter Squash	80 °F	80–85%	10–14 days	Stem is dry and skin is tougher

Curing allows the outer skin to dry out and harden, making it harder for pathogens or decay to set in. If you're not planning on storing the vegetables and you want to eat them immediately, you can skip the curing process. If possible, harvest on a dry day at the beginning of a sunny stretch.

Do not wash your vegetables when curing. Brush off any large dirt clumps and lay them out in a single layer with good ventilation.

The below chart snippet is ideal conditions, I've found I can store things (though not as long) if slightly warmer in most cases).

Root Cellar Storage Chart

Food	Temperature	Humidity
Garlic	32 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit	60 to 70 percent relative humidity
Winter Squash	50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit	60 to 75 percent relative humidity

Garlic and Onion

Onion and garlic curing temps should not exceed 85 degrees Fahrenheit, with optimal temps between 68–85°F and 70 percent relative humidity. Temperatures over 90 degrees and direct sunlight can cause sun scald; avoid this.

The curing process can take up to two weeks (or longer if temps are cooler and higher humidity). You know your onions and garlic are cured when the outer skins are dry and papery and the stems have shrunk and are hard (no green shows when you cut the stems near the neck). Long-term storage for onions and garlic is 32 degrees Fahrenheit (don't let them freeze) with 60 to 70 percent humidity and out of direct sunlight.

However, I braid mine and store them in our back pantry with an average of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit, and my garlic lasts a full year.

Winter Squash

To cure winter squash, pick when squash is ripe; indicators or ripeness are color change, skin toughening, and a drying stem.

When picking, leave about two inches of the stem; this helps prevent oxygen from getting into the squash and improves storage time.

Wipe off dirt and dry thoroughly (I will often use a vinegar-dampened towel) and lay in a well-ventilated area at 80 degrees Fahrenheit with the humidity 80 to 85 percent for 10 to 14 days.

After curing winter squash for two weeks, store in a cool, dry area at around 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

I store the majority in my back pantry with a few in the kitchen where the temps are closer to the lower to mid-sixties, and my butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash last between four and six months.

Squash in the cooler part of the house will last six months plus, with our spaghetti squash lasting the longest.

Make sure to check them routinely in case one does go bad. During storage, make sure garlic, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes have adequate air flow and aren't exposed to light.

I hang up my braids of onions and garlic and store potatoes in mesh bags in our pantry closet. Any containers used to hold potatoes or onions should be breathable; cardboard boxes and paper bags also work well. If using plastic containers, make sure they're not sealed and have a way to breathe or vent.

What if my temps aren't quite warm enough

We rarely have a full two weeks of exactly correct temps for onions and garlic in the fall. Erring on the cooler side, simply increase the curing time to three to four weeks.

If you don't have those types of temperatures (come harvest time in September and October we're never this warm), you can cure winter squash in a corner of your house at cooler temps; optimal is around 50 degrees, making sure you turn them over and no rot sets in.

Canning

Mastering Home Canning Safely

For many canning can be scary. They've heard stories about pressure canners exploding or about illnesses…or death, after someone ate home canned food.

Canning doesn't have to be scary if you understand the science behind it. Using the proper equipment is one key to producing healthy shelf stable food.

Why Home Canning?

Home canning offers numerous benefits, including:

- **Nutrition:** Preserve fresh produce at its peak, ensuring your family has access to nutrient-rich foods year-round.
- **Cost Savings:** Canning home-grown or in-season produce can significantly reduce your food budget.
- **Convenience:** Have ready-to-eat meals on hand, saving time and effort in meal preparation.
- **Food Security:** Build a reliable food supply, especially valuable during emergencies or power outages.

Key Steps to Successful Home Canning

Melissa outlines five key steps to mastering home canning:

1. **Essential Canning Equipment:** Use proper canning jars designed for repetitive use. Understand the differences between metal one-time use lids and reusable lids. Know the necessity of a water bath canner (or large pot with a rack) for acidic foods and a pressure canner for non-acidic foods.
2. **Understanding Food Science:** Grasp the critical role of acidity in preventing botulism. Learn which foods are safe for water bath canning (acidic foods) and which require pressure canning (non-acidic foods). Understand the importance of tested recipes and the use of added acid (bottled lemon juice, vinegar, or citric acid) in tomato and salsa canning.
3. **Pressure Canning Mastery:** Conquer your fear of pressure canning by understanding how it works. Learn about the different types of pressure canners, their safety mechanisms, and the importance of venting steam before pressurizing. Know the correct pressure and processing times for various foods and altitudes.

4. **Do Not Can List:** Be aware of foods that should not be canned at home, such as brassicas, summer squash, pureed vegetables, dairy, grains, pasta, solid fats, and pickled eggs. Understand why thickeners like cornstarch and flour are generally not recommended for canning.
5. **Pressure Canner Operation:** Learn the function of each part of the pressure canner and its purpose to ensure safe operation. Understand the difference between weighted and dial gauges and the importance of testing dial gauges annually. Know the importance of maintaining consistent pressure throughout the processing time.

Safety First

Safety is paramount in home canning. Botulism is a serious concern, but it can be avoided by following tested recipes and proper procedures. Understand the difference between acidic and non-acidic foods and the appropriate canning methods for each. Always use updated and reliable sources for canning information.

Additional Tips and Resources

- Track your family's food consumption to plan your canning efforts effectively.
- Start with simple recipes and gradually expand your skills.
- Consider joining a community of canners for support and advice.
- Utilize resources like the National Center for Home Food Preservation for accurate information.

By understanding the science behind canning and following safe practices, you can confidently preserve your food and enjoy the rewards of a well-stocked pantry.

Homemade Strawberry Jam

Makes approximately 4 pints or 5 six-ounce jelly jars

Ingredients

8 cups strawberries
3 cups sugar
Zest from 2 lemons
Juice from lemons

1. Wash jars and bands in hot soapy water. Place canning lids in a saucepan, cover with water, and heat on medium low heat. Fill water bath canner with water and put on medium heat.
2. Mash berries with a potato masher, blender, or immersion blender to desired consistency. I prefer mine chunky, but my husband likes it more pureed.
3. Place berries, sugar, lemon zest, and lemon juice into large pot. Stir until well combined. Bring berries to a boil.
4. If jam starts to foam, add a pat or two of butter to cut the foam.
5. Stir frequently to keep sugar from scorching. Simmer on a low boil for 10 minutes.
6. Test jam at 10 minutes for set. When jam is set or gelled (see troubleshooting tips below) take off of heat.
7. Place jars on a dish towel. Fill jars with a ¼ inch from the top with jam. A canning funnel will be your best friend during this part. With a clean damp towel, wipe down rim of jar. Place lids on, then bands, and screw down to finger tight.
8. Immerse jars in water bath canner inside the canning rack, making sure water covers the tops of the jars by 1 to 2 inches. Once water is boiling, set timer for 10 minutes and allow jars to process.
9. When time is up, turn off heat. After 5 minutes remove jars from canner. Place on a towel folded in thirds in a draft free area. Allow to cool and set overnight or for at least 12 hours. Check seals. If the center of the lid gives, then store in the fridge and eat soon.
10. If jars are sealed, wipe down with a damp cloth and store in the pantry out of the light for up to a year.

Recipe from *The Made-From-Scratch Life*

How to Make & Can Bone Broth

Having homemade broth sitting on the shelf is a wonderful addition to the home pantry. Not only does it make tasty meals (I like to cook rice and quinoa in broth for more nutrition and flavor) but when you're under the weather you don't have to go through the process of making broth to get a good dose in. I've frozen broth as well, but when our power goes out, I don't want to lose all that golden deliciousness… plus I don't always remember to thaw it out beforehand either.

Homemade broth also gives you the ability to control the ingredients, specifically the quality of the ingredients. Because we raise all of our own meat, I know the bones I'm using are from grass-fed and organically fed animals, which means the quality of my broth will be higher as well. If you're able to, I'd try and use organic grass-fed meat and bones for making your broth.

You can make vegetable, chicken or turkey, or beef broth. I like to have both beef and chicken broth on hand.

There are two ways to make your broth, you can do it on the stove top or in a slow cooker. I prefer to do the slow cooker because I pour all the ingredients in, turn it on, and never touch it until it's finished. The longer the broth cooks, the richer and darker in color it will be as well. The only disadvantage I have using my slow cooker is I'm limited to the size of the slow cooker for how much broth I can make at one time.

How to Make Broth

Place your bones (some people prefer to do just bones with bits of meat left on them, others prefer to put a whole chicken that has been cut up with the meat still on, I used soup bones with meat for my beef broth) into your pot or slow cooker. If you want to add vegetables in you may but see our note on processing times when using vegetables and meat together, or you may use all vegetables.

Measure out how much water you're pouring in to cover the bones, meat and vegetables. This will be approximately how much liquid you get back out (minus a cup or so) so you know how many jars to prepare for canning.

I toss odd and end pieces of vegetables into a freezer container for broth making, the ends of celery, onion skins, ends of carrots or any other small amounts of vegetables I'd normally discard. Beings we're straining the broth and not eating the vegetables; I don't care if it's the odd and end pieces. This is also very frugal.

For the **slow cooker method**, turn it on low and let it cook for 8 to 10 hours. For the **stove top method**, bring ingredients to a low boil and boil for 2 hours. For an **Instant Pot or electric pressure cooker** (for making broth only not processing/canning) I use 2 hours on soup setting.

When broth is cooked, strain your broth through a fine strainer or you can line a strainer with cheese cloth, but I just use a fine mesh strainer and don't mind if tiny bits of meat filter through (we're talking itty bitty).

Place broth into fridge until the fat layer on the top of the broth is white and turns completely solid. Skim off this fat and discard or for another use. (Beef fat is tallow and can be used in candle or soap making, though this is usually a small amount).

Prepare your pressure canner and wash jars in hot soapy water. I give mine a final rinse in hot water right before filling with the boiling broth. Start heating the water in your pressure canner so it is warm when you place prepared jars into water.

Place strained and skimmed broth back into a large pot and bring to a boil. Fill jars with broth to a 1-inch headspace. Wipe the rim using a clean towel that's been moistened with vinegar. Using vinegar to clean the rim when canning things like meat or combination recipes helps remove any fat residue that may be on the rim and could inhibit a seal.

Put lid and band on jar, screw band down to fingertip tight and place jar in pressure canner. When all the jars are in the pressure canner, lock lid into place and turn heat to medium-high. Allow steam to vent for 10 minutes through the vent pipe then place your weighted pressure gauge on at 10 pounds of pressure.

How to Can Broth

1. Remove fat from chilled bone broth and bring broth to a boil in a large pot.
2. Wash all jars in hot soapy water, checking rims for chips or nicks.
3. Add water to your pressure canner, filling to the recommended depth in your pressure canner manual for your given elevation (I fill mine to the lowest line on the inside of the pot).
4. Fill clean jars with hot water and set aside.
5. Once your broth has come to a boil, take one jar at a time, dump the hot water out and add 1/2-1 teaspoon sea salt (optional), then fill with broth leaving 1-inch headspace.
6. Wipe down rims of jars with a clean, damp towel.
7. Add lids and canning bands and tighten to fingertip tight.
8. Place jars into the pressure canner. Then cover and secure the canner following the instructions for your specific model, turn heat up to high, and allow the pot to come up to a boil.
9. Allow the steam to vent through the pressure valve for 10 minutes.
10. After you've let it vent for 10 minutes, place the rocker or weight over the vent and allow the pressure to come up. Refer to the safety notes below for the proper pressure you should use for your elevation. Find your altitude to determine what is correct for your specific location.
11. Once the canner has reached the proper pounds of pressure, start your timer and process for the correct time for the size of jar you are using. If you have both pint and quart, process for the quart jar time. The processing time and pounds of pressure is listed in the chart below.
12. When processing time is up, turn off heat and let the pressure canner reduce pressure naturally. When pressure is fully reduced (wait an extra few minutes to be sure), remove

canner lid and wait 5 minutes. Carefully remove jars from the pressure canner and place onto a towel on the counter.

13. Allow jars to cool for 24 hours. Remove canning bands and check for proper seal. Label the jars.
14. If any jars didn't seal correctly, move them to the refrigerator and use within a week.

Safety Notes

Always process bone broth starting with boiling broth, anything colder may not process at safe canning temperatures.

There is no tested time or recipe for canning **fish stock or fish broth** that I have seen.

Please see links for processing recipes with both bone/meat and vegetables.
If following the tested recipe with the exact amount of vegetables they have listed (links below in chart), then shorter processing times per the recipe is fine, if doing your own combination of vegetables and meat, please see chart and process the same as if you were making a combination soup recipe (I know we're removing the solids) and process to the times based from the National Home Center of Food Preservation for soup.

Proper Canning Pressure for your Elevation (in feet)

Weighted gauge: Use a 10-pound weighted gauge (if you are between 0-1,000 feet above sea level) or a 15-pound weighted gauge (if you're 1,001 feet above sea level or higher).

Dial gauge: Bring the pressure up to the correct psi for your elevation (in feet):

0-2,000 feet above sea level: **11 psi**
2,001-4,000 feet above sea level: **12 psi**
4,001-6,000 feet above sea level: **13 psi**
6,001 to 8,000 feet above sea level: **14 psi**

Processing Times for Broth

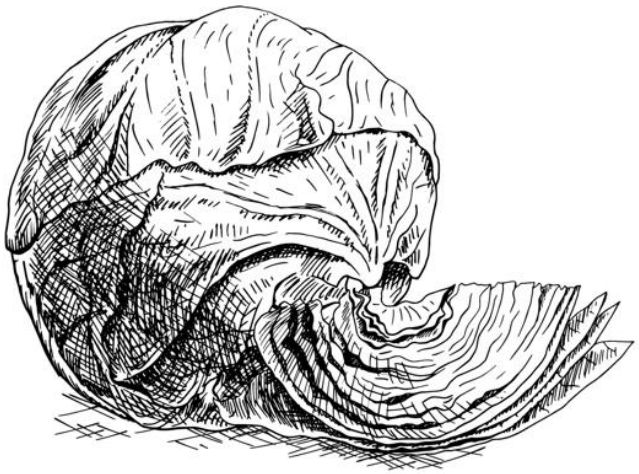
*see above note for altitude adjustments

Broth Type	Pound of Pressure		Processing Times	
	Weighted-gauge pressure canner	Dial-gauge pressure canner	Pint Jars	Quart Jars
Beef	10	11	20 minutes	25 minutes
Chicken	10	11	20 minutes	25 minutes
Vegetable via **this recipe from Ball/Bernadine**	10	11	30 minutes	35 minutes
Combination of **Beef and vegetable recipe from Ball/Bernardin**	10	11	20 minutes	25 minutes
Combination of **Chicken and vegetable via this recipe from Ball/Bernardin**	10	11	20 minutes	25 minutes
Vegetable broth or your own combination of chicken/beef and vegetables **not from an above tested recipe**	10	11	60 min	75 min

NOTE: Vegetable broth has a longer processing time. If you're adding vegetables to your meat, then it's a combination recipe and should be canned to the longest processing ingredient. There are recipes from the Ball Complete Book of Canning and Bernardin website I've linked to above that have some specified vegetable amounts with their chicken and beef stock and a shorter processing time; however, this is a tested recipe. If you're following their exact recipe, then it's fine to go the shorter 20-minute processing time, but if you're adding in vegetables to taste (which is what I do) we must process to the longer time.

I prefer to have both pint and quart sizes on hand for varying recipes and can in pints when it's a smaller batch and quarts when I make a larger batch. Enjoy your jars of home canned nourishing goodness!

Fermenting



Fast and Easy Ferments

Ready to dive into the world of fermenting and boost your family's gut health while adding delicious flavors to your meals? We'll equip you with the knowledge and confidence to preserve your harvest year-round and create ferments your family will love, even if they're not fans of store-bought varieties.

Why Ferment?

Fermenting is an ancient method of food preservation that not only extends the shelf life of your produce but also offers incredible health benefits. Fermented foods are packed with probiotics, which support gut health, digestion, and the immune system. Plus, they offer prebiotics, dietary fibers that feed the good bacteria in your gut. Home fermentation allows you to control the flavor, sourness, and ingredients, making it a superior option to store-bought ferments.

Addressing Common Concerns

Many people feel intimidated by fermenting, worrying about ruining food or unsure of where to start. Melissa understands these concerns, sharing her initial nervousness and early experiences with mold issues. However, she emphasizes that with the right knowledge and techniques, fermenting is a straightforward and rewarding process.

Common concerns include:

- **Fear of ruining food:** With proper guidance, you can avoid common pitfalls and ensure successful ferments.
- **Lack of knowledge about supplies and methods:** This guide will cover the essential equipment and steps needed to get started.
- **Uncertainty about the "sour factor":** Home fermentation allows you to adjust the sourness to your family's taste preferences.
- **Time constraints:** Fermenting is a quick and efficient way to preserve food, even with a busy schedule.

The Probiotic Powerhouse

Fermented foods are a fantastic source of probiotics, which offer numerous health benefits:

- **Gut health and digestion:** Probiotics support a healthy gut microbiome, aiding digestion and potentially alleviating irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

- **Immune system boost:** A significant portion of the immune system resides in the gut, and probiotics can enhance its function.
- **Mental health:** The gut-brain axis connects the gut to the brain, and a healthy gut can positively impact anxiety and depression.
- **Other benefits:** Probiotics may also help with cholesterol, skin health, inflammation, and blood pressure.

Fermenting Basics

Understanding the fundamentals of fermentation is crucial for safety and success:

- **Anaerobic environment:** Fermentation occurs in an environment without oxygen. This is achieved by keeping the food (solids) submerged below the liquid (brine).
- **Acidic environment:** Lactic acid bacteria consume starches and sugars, lowering the pH to an acidic level that prevents harmful bacteria growth.
- **Brine:** The liquid used in fermenting, which can be a wet brine (salt and water) or a dry brine (salt draws out liquid from vegetables).

Essential Fermenting Equipment

To get started, you'll need the following equipment:

- **Glass jars or fermenting crocks with lids:** Wide-mouth glass mason jars are ideal for beginners.
- **Fermenting weight:** This keeps the solids submerged below the brine. Glass weights, small glass jars, or sanitized rocks can be used. Avoid plastic bags filled with water.
- **Unrefined mineral or sea salt:** Use salt without added anti-caking agents or iodine, such as Redmond's Real Salt.
- **Optional: Fermenting airlock lid systems:** These help to prevent mold and yeast development. Alternatively, you can use a metal canning lid and band, but you'll need to "burp" the jar daily to release gases.
- **Optional: Starter culture:** Needed for specific ferments like yogurt or kombucha, but not for vegetable ferments.

Fermenting Steps

1. **Prep:** Wash and prepare your vegetables or fruit (slice, shred, etc.).
2. **Place:** Add the prepared food to your container.
3. **Cover with brine:** Ensure the salt brine completely covers the contents, leaving about an inch of headspace.
4. **Add weight:** Keep the contents submerged with a weight.
5. **Airlock lid:** Put on your airlock lid or metal lid and band.
6. **First ferment:** Allow it to ferment at room temperature (60-70°F) for the first ferment stage.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Incorrect salt brine percentage:** Use the correct ratio of salt to liquid or vegetables.
- **Not keeping items submerged:** All solids must be below the liquid surface with a weight.
- **Incorrect temperature:** Maintain the ideal room temperature (60-70°F) for the first ferment stage.

Embrace the World of Ferments

With these guidelines, you can confidently start your fermenting journey. Enjoy the delicious flavors and incredible health benefits of homemade ferments and fill your pantry with nutritious and preserved foods.

Discover the Delightful World of Fermentation

Welcome to the exciting world of fermentation! If you're looking to enhance your gut health, improve nutrient absorption, and add delicious, complex flavors to your meals, you've come to the right place. Fermented foods are not only packed with probiotics and prebiotics, but they also offer a unique culinary experience that can transform your everyday dishes.

The Power of Fermented Foods for Gut Health and Immunity

Fermented foods are more than just a trendy health fad; they're a time-honored tradition with incredible benefits. Over 70% of our immune system resides in our gut, and maintaining a healthy gut is crucial for overall well-being. Fermented foods, being cultured, are teeming with beneficial bacteria that support this vital system.

These foods have already been pre-digested by good bacteria, making nutrients and minerals more readily available for our bodies to absorb. Think of it as a double whammy: you get both prebiotics (food for the good bacteria) and probiotics (the good bacteria themselves) when you consume naturally fermented foods. This dynamic duo helps your system pull out the essential elements from your food, bolstering your immune system and improving digestion.

Beyond Store-Bought: The Magic of Homemade Ferments

If you've had a less-than-stellar experience with store-bought fermented foods like kombucha or sauerkraut, don't give up just yet! Homemade ferments are a completely different ball game. Many people find store-bought versions unpalatable, and the author of this guide is among them, admitting a dislike for even raw, unpasteurized store-bought sauerkraut.

However, the magic happens when you make it yourself. Homemade sauerkraut, especially curtido, is a revelation. The difference lies in the control you have over flavorings and the strength of fermentation. You can tailor the taste to your preferences, creating a night-and-day difference compared to commercial products.

A World of Fermented Delights

Fermentation isn't limited to just vegetables like curtido and kimchi. You can also ferment fruits, creating delicious and healthy treats that aren't necessarily sour. And let's not forget fermented condiments, like homemade pepper sauce. One person's initial skepticism turned into enthusiastic delight, quickly making it a household favorite. This pepper sauce, made just a week prior, was already being devoured and required plans for future batches.

Prolonging Shelf Life and Enjoying Year-Round Goodness

Another fantastic benefit of fermentation is its ability to significantly extend the shelf life of your produce. Raw cabbage or peppers might last a couple of weeks at best, either on the counter or in the fridge. But once fermented, these same vegetables can stay fresh and delicious in your refrigerator or a cold storage space for weeks, even months!

Imagine having curtido made in the fall still tasting amazing in the springtime. This longevity ensures you can enjoy your harvest well beyond its typical lifespan, reducing waste and providing a steady supply of nutritious food.

Getting Started with Fermentation

If you're new to fermentation or think you don't like fermented foods, this is your invitation to explore. Start with small batches and be prepared to be pleasantly surprised. You'll discover a world of flavors and health benefits that store-bought products simply can't match.

In this guide, you'll learn how to make both fermented salsa and preserve lemons through fermentation, two household favorites that are sure to become staples in your kitchen. Get ready to unlock the secrets of fermentation and transform your culinary experience!

Fermenting Best Practices

Fermenting is fairly easy, but there are some things you can do to ensure it's successful. Below are those best practices for best results.

- Make sure the solids are below the brine liquid level. Any part of your vegetable or fruit needs to stay beneath the brine solution. Otherwise, it will mold and contaminate the entire batch. Nobody wants that!
- Keep different types of ferments or cultures separated. It's ok to have different vegetable ferments sitting next to each other, but you don't want your vegetable ferment next to your Kombucha or sourdough. Otherwise, your sourdough just might taste like your kimchi or vice versa. There are different yeasts and cultures, but they can cross-contaminate. **Ideally you want them 6 feet apart.** Once the initial stage of fermenting is done, which is at room temperature, and you move them into the fridge or cold storage, then you don't need to worry about it. You can definitely have them next to each other in the fridge.
- Ferments most likely will overflow, especially within the first couple of days. Keep them on a vessel that will catch that overflow: a bowl, plate, rimmed cookie sheet, etc.
- You can adjust seasonings (increase red pepper powder, decrease garlic, etc.) but keep the same salt ratio for the ferment. Refer to the salt brine lesson for more information.
- Temperature affects your ferments. Best temperatures for ferments and cultures is room temperature: 70-75˚ Fahrenheit. At higher temperatures, 80s or higher, it's common for yeast overgrowth. Kahm yeast can develop easier. Your ferment can also over ferment very quickly. If you're in an area where temps are very warm, keep a close eye on your ferments. On the flipside, low temps, 50s and 60s, will slow the fermentation because it keeps the yeasts/bacteria from growing. You really need them to multiply and take over to reach the desired acidity level to keep the bad bacteria at bay.
- Check your ferments using a clean utensil about the 2-day mark. Gauge it by flavor and if it's reached your desired flavor. The longer it goes at room temperature the more sour, pungent the more the fermented flavor it's going to take on. When you put it in the fridge it'll slow down, the rate of fermentation.
- Even after putting your ferment in the fridge, you want the vegetable or fruit to remain below the liquid level.
- Don't double dip. Only use the spoon to remove what you want. If you take a bite off that spoon do NOT put it back into your ferment. That will contaminate it.
- Store your ferments in a cool environment, otherwise they will over-ferment. Over fermented food will be really strong, and at some point, they'll start to break down and become inedible. A refrigerator is a great place to store them but not absolutely necessary. A basement or room in your house that doesn't get warm (stays 50 to even upper 40s) would work. You don't want your ferments to freeze though because that will cause texture issues and can kill the bacteria/yeast. In the old days they would use root cellars, crawl spaces, or bury the crocks.

Fermented Salsa

Ingredients

1 ½ pounds tomatoes, quartered
1 onion, quartered
1 bell pepper, quartered
½ jalapeno, sliced
7 cloves garlic, peeled
¾ teaspoon cumin, ground
½ cup cilantro, chopped (optional)
½ teaspoon lime juice, fresh or bottled
1 tablespoon salt

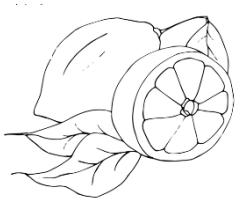
Directions

1. Start by putting the tomatoes into a food processor and pulse until chopped. Don't liquify them.
2. Pour tomatoes into a bowl. Pull out any large chunks and cut them into your desired size.
3. Put the rest of the vegetables in the food processor and pulse until chopped to desired size. Be careful not to liquify them.
4. Mix them into the tomatoes.
5. Add the cumin and mix well. Add the cilantro if you're using it.
6. Add the salt and mix well.
7. Using a funnel, pour the salsa into jars.
8. Add fermenting weights to the jars to push the solids beneath the liquid line. Make sure to keep about an ½ free at the top.
9. Add airlock lids, if using, and allow to sit at room temperature for 3 days. Let the salsa sit for 3 days, then give it a taste test to see if it's to your desired flavor. Continue to ferment until it's to your liking. Then transfer to cold storage.

Notes

You can keep your salsa in cold storage – a refrigerator or a root cellar/basement if kept at 50 degrees or less. For long term storage, the upper 30s and 40s work best. It will last for months and even up to a year and a half in the fridge.

Preserving Lemons



There are two fermentation methods for preserving lemons.

- Whole
- Scored

Scored lemons are best used in savory dishes while whole fermented lemons are better for sweets.

Ingredients

6-8 whole organic lemons
2 tablespoons salt

Steps for Ferment Lemons

1. Wash the lemons in hot water. Wash and rinse a wide-mouth quart jar.
2. Score the lemon from the stem side (pointy part) into quarter; try to leave the bottom half inch intact because it makes the next step easier.
3. Open the lemon and sprinkle a scant teaspoonful of salt inside. Place the lemon, cut sides up, in the jar. Repeat, packing tightly to get all of the lemons inside the jar.
4. Once lemons have reached the top of the jar shoulder, you should have enough juice to cover them. If not, you can make a saltwater brine to top it off. Or you can use fresh-squeezed lemon juice from an additional lemon). If any part of the lemon pops up, use a weight to keep them fully submerged.
5. Place a lid on the jar and allow it to ferment at room temperature for 4 to 5 days.
6. Move to the refrigerator or cold room for long-term storage. Use the fermented juice in any savory dish that calls for lemon juice, adjusting the salt as the fermented lemons already have salt. The rinds will soften during fermentation, so be sure to finely chop and use them in your dishes as well; it's not just about the juice!

To ferment whole lemons, skip scoring them. Create the 3% brine (doubling the recipe below) to cover the lemons.

3% Brine

1 tablespoon salt

Planning

Find Your Why and Develop a Plan

To find your reason you need to figure out your top skills you want and need to learn. Even if it's something you already know how to do, but you need to figure out how to integrate it into your daily life.

That's why we need to focus on planning to achieve this.

That plan should be SMART.

Specific: What needs to be accomplished? What steps need to be taken to achieve it?

Measurable: What milestones can be set to help you achieve your goal? Make these minor achievements – completing a task or step by a specific date.

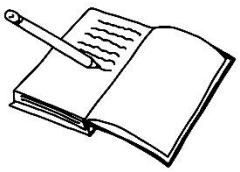
Achievable: Your goal should be realistic. Can it be reasonably done in the timeframe you have? Do you have restraints or obstacles that may prevent you from reaching your goal? Scale back if necessary.

Relevant: Does the goal you're setting contribute to your long-term goals? Set goals that contribute to what you want in life.

Time-Bound: Determine a set start and end time. Without a deadline it's too easy to keep putting it off.

Having an accountability partner can be a key for success. A partner can help you make sure you don't let yourself slide.

Food Preservation Planning System



There's always a lot of focus on garden planning and planting, but when it comes to what to do with all your harvest, we're not quite sure what to do with it or how to keep up with it all. That could mean a lot of it went to waste or foisted it off onto friends, neighbors, and family.

Having a plan in place definitely makes things easier and less overwhelming. Below are the steps to take before you ever have a kitchen full of produce to preserve.

Know when food items are in season. The Seasonal Harvest & Recipe Guide or Harvest to Table magazine are great resources to get a general idea. Or you can check out a local orchard. There's an orchard not too far away that provides flyers showcasing what they have available each month. It's also found on their website.

Decide your mainstays. For example, that could be tomato sauce, green beans, pickled asparagus, pickled green beans, cucumber pickles, salsa, jams and jellies, sage, mint, and dill.

Go by the items your family eats on a regular basis and focus on those items first.

Make a plan for where or how you'll obtain the food. If you're not growing it on your own, map out orchards, farms, and farmers' markets for your local area. Other options are to order from Azure Standard or other co-op type source. Another option is to purchase from the grocery store when they have a good sale.

Pick your preservation methods. Each method has pros and cons, but what's most important is that you pick the methods that work best for you. Regardless, make sure you follow updated safety guidelines and food preservation safety, especially for canning. Main methods are:

- Canning
- Dehydrating
- Fermenting
- Freezing
- Root cellar techniques
- Using salt
- Freeze drying

Put your plan down on paper. By writing out your preserving plan, you'll have a really good idea of what you need. You can use the Preservation Tracker to create your plan as well as track what you actually preserve. Just print two copies and write PLAN on one copy. On your plan identify what and when and how you'll be preserving.

Decide which method you'll use for each crop. Knowing this allows you to focus on the most important preservation method first. For example, if you need 50 jars of canned green beans, those

get done first then the rest of the crop is allowed to mature into seed/dry beans, and can vegetable soup.

Don't forget your herbs. Dehydration is the most common method but you can also turn some fresh herbs into pesto or make compound butter and freeze them. Or you can preserve some herbs in salt.

Pick what produce needs to be preserved fresh. Not all of it has to be processed in its finished form right away. Some can be done later. Here's how:

- Berries and cherries can be frozen and dealt with later. This is especially helpful for making jam, jelly, syrup, pie filling, or even dehydrating.
- Tomatoes that will be made into sauces or canned can be frozen. This is great if you don't have enough tomatoes for a full run to do sauce, or you have limited time, or need to wait until temperatures are cooler. It actually saves time because the skins slip right off when they thaw. This means no dunking in boiling water!
- Cabbage can be kept in cool storage to wait for a time when you're able to do a sauerkraut ferment. The sooner you're able to do it though, the more nutrients it'll have though.
- Winter squash can be kept in root cellar condition until you have time during the winter months to can it.

Make sure you have all your supplies. When it's time to preserve, you don't want to have everything prepped and ready only to realize you're out of wide-mouthed canning lids, or don't have enough salt to make your brine for fermenting, or you're short on vinegar.

Go through your supplies and stock up for the season before you begin any food preservation. Here are some suggested supplies and ingredients to make sure to have on hand, depending on what you plan to preserve:

- Salt
- Vinegar
- Canning jars in all the sizes you'll be using
- Canning lids
- Vacuum seal bags or zip-lock bags
- Mylar bags
- Herbs and seasonings
- Oxygen absorbers
- Sugar
- Ice
- Citric acid
- Pomona's Universal Pectin
- Parchment paper

This list is in no way comprehensive, but it should give you an idea where to start.

Be strategic with your harvest and time. If you know making pickles is one of your top priority foods, then, when the cucumbers are on, you know picking them in the cool of the morning is important for crisp pickles.

You may not have time to make the pickles that morning but if you pick in the morning and prep them in a cold ice water bath with salt, then in the evening when you have time, you can drain and process them.

Or you can pick in the morning and put everything in the fridge to stay cool until you can process it later in the day (or sometimes a few days) rather than leave it on the vine, especially if they're close to becoming overripe. This helps you do a specific task when you have a small pocket of time, then do the next step when you have another pocket of time.

Another example of this is with green beans. The night before you plan to can, pick the harvest. The following morning, rinse, string and snap them. Then, after dinner, raw pack pressure can them.

Have your recipes ready. Have recipes ready to go and accessible when the time comes. Make sure to read through that recipe in its entirety so you don't miss a critical step or procedure. I cannot stress reading through it first. This fall I decided to make sweet gherkins for my dad. I started the process not realizing it took 3 DAYS with all the steps involved. Had I known that I would have opted for something slightly different. I was leaving town shortly after starting the process so it was extremely stressful trying to get them done before I had to leave.