

The S&S Homestead Foodbook

Chapter Eight

Keeping the Harvest



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Keeping The Harvest

Summer bounty can delight and nourish you all year. Most foods can be dried, canned, pickled or frozen. If you don't have a garden, or it does not provide surplus, contact a local market gardener. "Seconds" that are left in the field because they are imperfect and can't be sold to a restaurant, grocery store, or in the Farmers' Market, are usually fine for home preserving. A note of caution: foods are not improved by preserving. With a few exceptions, such as tomatoes that will be sauced, they should be at the peak of color and ripeness.

Equipment

I rely on a water bath canner, a pressure canner, a dehydrator, a large steamer, a juice-maker, and a cider press. With the exception of the steamer and the water bath canner, these were expensive in the original outlay, but paid for themselves very quickly. Before you invest in any equipment, however, ask around. Many people have canning equipment stored in basements, attics, or garages.

Water bath canners come with aluminum racks. It is worthwhile to order a stainless steel rack, because aluminum racks rust after the first use.

Water Bath Canning

There are many good canning books available: my standbys are Rodale, Ferarri, and The Ball Canning Book. Rodale has a thousand ways to preserve foods, Ferrari has excellent recipes, and the Ball Canning Book will give you the best safety information. Do not use old canning books: vegetables, especially hybrids, may be lower in acid than vegetables grown even ten years ago, which means you need to add an acidifier, such as vinegar, or process them for longer times. Older books also often recommend undesirably long blanching times for vegetables you are going to freeze. If in any doubt about safety of equipment or procedures, call your local Extension Agent or the producers of your canning jars.

What follows is not a complete step-by-step discussion of the canning process, which you can find in any book on food processing, but rather things I have learned (often the hard way) over time.

Sterilizing: To sterilize canning jars, wash them in hot, soapy water, place them in a cool oven, and turn the temperature to 200. This will keep your clean jars hot while you prepare the food. Many books recommend boiling the jars after they are washed, but I find the oven method to be much easier, safer (you are not handling jars filled with boiling water), and more energy efficient – your burner isn't going to work those extra minutes.

Boil water and pour it over lids and caps. After five minutes, these will be sterile.

Processing: Add a splash of vinegar to the canning water to prevent scaling on the jars. Try to have the food, the jars, and the water about the same temperature. This prevents breakage from too-quick temperature change. The water in the canner should be warm but not boiling. Be sure to follow instructions about headroom (the space between the food and the rim of the jar). Place the filled, sealed jars on the rack in the canner.

Turn the burner to high, and start timing when the water begins to boil. Then turn the burner to medium: the water will continue to boil without spilling over and without rattling the jars together. When the time is up, turn the burner off and let the jars stay in the canner until the water is cool enough to put your hand into. Be patient about this. If you remove the jars too soon, liquid will bubble out the top because of a too-quick change in temperature. This means that you will have an air space between lid and food. If the jars are properly sealed, this is not dangerous, but you will have sticky jars, and the food at the top will discolor.

Freezing

I freeze berries for eating during the winter or making into jam or juice in the spring. In either case, I move them from field to freezer as quickly as possible. Strawberries that sit in the refrigerator before freezing lose much of their fragrance and flavor. Wash fruit minimally, and only if you have to: put berries in a pan of water, and lift them out – the dirt will fall to the bottom. Place them on a rack to dry a bit before putting them into freezer bags. I add a little sugar to draw the juice. I know of people who freeze other fruits, such as plums or peaches, but I don't do this unless I am going to juice them. Freezing destroys the texture of these fruits, and you wind up with mush.

Vegetables that are going to be frozen should also go from field to freezer as quickly as possible. Ideally, they should be picked in the morning, when the sugar and water content is high, and kept in cold water until you blanch them. Blanching stops the enzyme process, and ensures you of vegetables that taste as if they were right out of the garden. I blanch as little as possible. In the case of peas, I put them in a colander that sits in a pan of boiling water. When the peas rise to the top and are barely softened, I put them in another colander that is sitting in a pan of cold water. As soon as they are cool, I move them to a third colander to shed excess water, and then pour them into freezer bags. (If you put the freezer bags into a large cup, they will hold their shape as you fill them.) I prefer bags that are closed with a plastic tie to zip-lock bags. The zip-locks can open in the freezer.

Drying

In my early days when I tried to preserve everything, I tried drying carrots, large peas and beans to use in soups during the winter. Alas, all of them came out tasting like old, musty peanuts. Now I dry only apple and plum slices (soaked in lemon juice to preserve their color) and tomatoes. The apples and plums are a great snack – Henning often puts a bag of them in his pocket to chew on during the day. The tomatoes are wonderful. I slice them thin, sprinkle dried basil over the top (keep the racks over the sink so that the basil does not clog the fan) and dry them until the slices are like leather. I put them in freezer bags, (there is enough residual moisture to create mold if they are put on the shelf) and use them all winter in egg dishes, pasta sauces, salad dressings, and soups.

Juicing

We juice plums, grapes, black and red currants, and any melons we can't eat fresh. Sometimes I combine the fruits, aiming for a juice that is not too acid. (Apples, which are relatively dry, need to go through a cider press.) The juicer I use is invaluable. It is stainless steel, and consists of a three sections: there is a large pot that sits on the burner. It is filled with water, and a splash of vinegar to prevent scaling. On top of that sits another pot with a funnel and an outlet for a plastic hose, where the juice accumulates and from which it is drained. On top of that sits a colander, into which the fruits and berries go. You do not need to wash the fruit, and can include stems, seeds, and even leaves. If the fruit is sour, as are some plums, as you fill the colander, sprinkle sugar over the fruit at regular intervals. Turn the burner on high until the water begins to boil, and then turn the heat to medium. Steam rises into the colander, cooks and sterilizes the fruit, and the juice dribbles down into the second pot. You can drain the juice directly into jars, leaving $\frac{1}{4}$ inch headroom, cap them, and the jars will self-seal. I prefer to drain the juice into a large pot until I have processed all the fruit for that session. I then re-heat the juice to just below boiling, ladle it into hot, sterile jars, and process briefly in a water bath canner. The juice we get from this process is concentrated, so that one quart of canned juice provides two quarts of drinking juice.

Pressure Canning

It is possible to pressure can meats such as chicken and beef. However, the necessary processing time tends to make these meats mushy, so we prefer to keep them frozen. For processing broth, the pressure method is invaluable. Broth can be frozen, but jars tend to break in the freezer, and it takes a long time to thaw broth before it can be used.

I can chicken and beef broth, using the same method for both. Cover beef bones or chicken parts with water. Bring to a boil and then cook simmer for about three days until the broth is fragrant and colorful and grease is floating on the top. Strain the broth and discard the bones. The fat in non-organic meats contains chemical residue; the broth should be cooled until the fat has hardened and can be skimmed off the top. In organic meats, vitamins and minerals and flavor reside in the fat, and it should be part of the broth. Follow directions for pressure canning. We use this wonderful broth for soups and casseroles, and also sprinkle it with fresh herbs and eat it with French bread for a simple and thoroughly satisfying meal.

If you do not have your own animals, you might contact a butcher and ask for the bones and scraps from animals that have been organically raised.

Some canned organic foods are available in the grocery store, but are much more expensive than non-organic foods. Besides, having your own preserved food keeps you self-sufficient. When I plan meals, I look first to the garden, second to my canned stores, and third, into the freezer. Then I go to the grocery store. Because of our fresh and preserved foods, my grocery cart usually contains nothing more than cleaning supplies and toilet paper.

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My mother used to tell me that fresh is best, frozen is ok, and canned is better than nothing. But that was in the day that most fresh foods available at the store were organically and responsibly grown. Now, I would say that your own preserved, organic foods are better for you than fresh produce at the store, which may have traveled thousands of miles, and come supplied with more poisons than nutrients. Process your own food, and enjoy pulling dinner off the shelf!

Fermented Foods

Before refrigeration, canning and freezing were widely available, traditional peoples preserved milk, meat, fish, fruits and vegetables by drying, salting, and fermenting them. We are familiar with fermentation in beer, wine, cheese, sauerkraut, and yogurt, to name the most common examples, and it is one of the processes most beneficial to health.

Fermentation preserves food nutrients; pasteurization (cooking) destroys many of them. Pasteurizing milk, for example, dramatically reduces its vitamin content, reduces the availability of its minerals, and destroys its enzymes entirely.

Fermentation also breaks food nutrients down into more digestible forms. People who cannot drink fresh milk because they are lactose intolerant can usually digest its fermented forms, such as quark, yogurt, and kefir, very easily.

Some fermenting agents act as antioxidants, which remove free radicals from the cells of the body and thus help prevent cancer.

Fermentation also removes toxins from foods that contain them. For example, all grains contain phytic acid, which can block the body's absorption of some minerals. Soaking grains before cooking them neutralizes phytic acid.

The importance of fermented foods in the diet is appreciated by physicians who use foods to treat or prevent illnesses. They often cite an article published in *The Lancet*, the largest medical journal in the English-speaking world, which reported on a study done on school children in Sweden. Half attended a Waldorf school; the other half did not. The researchers found that the children in the Waldorf school had thirty to forty percent fewer allergies, ear infections, asthma, dermatitis and other skin ailments. The two most important dietary differences between these groups of children were that students at the Waldorf school consumed raw milk and its products, and ate fermented foods.

Kim Chi

I knew about Kim Chi as a traditional Asian food, but had never eaten it because of its reputation of being spicy-hot. Since Henning and I eat a northern European diet because those are the foods we grow here, I did not think Kim Chi would ever be part of our regular fare, even though sauerkraut, its milder cousin, is a common dish on our table. Then Jesse Pizzitola, one of our interns, gave us a jar of Kim Chi that he had made. It was so flavorful (without being too spicy for our palates) that it has become a regular condiment for us.

The lovely thing about making Kim Chi is that you can vary it as you like – more garlic, hotter chili peppers, less onion, more cabbage – it all depends on your taste. This is the recipe Jesse passed on to us.

1 head cabbage, chopped

2 tsps salt for every pound of cabbage

A chunk of fresh ginger (about an inch long), peeled and diced

4 cloves garlic, quartered

1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced (or an Ancho chili for a warmer flavor)
1 Anaheim pepper, seeded and diced
1 large onion, minced
Ground pepper, to taste

Chop the cabbage, mix with salt, and let it sit until the salt begins to draw liquid out of the cabbage. Add the rest of the vegetables and the pepper, mix well, and put into a half-gallon glass jar. Weight the vegetables so that they will be immersed as the fluid begins to rise.

Place in a cool area for a week or more, until the vegetables have a mellow taste, and then refrigerate.

Kim Chi with Red Cabbage

When winter comes on and the white cabbages are long gone, red cabbages are still in our garden. With them, I make a sturdy Kim Chi, and we always have a quart jar of it in our refrigerator. We eat it nearly every day in winter; it is great with sandwiches. Because the fermentation process requires a lot of salt, I rinse the Kim Chi in a strainer before serving.

1 large head red cabbage, finely chopped
1 red pepper, chopped
1 yellow pepper, chopped
1 green pepper, chopped
1 Anaheim pepper, chopped
5 small carrots, scrubbed and chopped
1-2 onions, chopped
5 cloves garlic, chopped
Gingerroot to taste, minced
Various hot peppers if you want the mix to be spicy
Sea salt

Enough water to cover vegetables in the jar; use 1 T sea salt for every cup water. Mix to dissolve salt.

Mix vegetables, pack into jars, cover with brine, and place in cool area for a week or more to ferment. Then store in refrigerator or a cool storage area. Our kim chi keeps for months in the pantry that is part of our garage, which maintains a steady 50 degree temperature throughout the year. Note: if the brine is really high in the jar, it will bubble through the lid and stain the shelf it is stored on. Place a thick layer of newspaper under the jar during storage.

Sauerkraut

To Make

Making sauerkraut is a yearly tradition in our household, and it is disarmingly simple and quick to do. I use a 5 gallon crock and make a year's supply at a time, but you can make smaller amounts, as well. (See method for Kim Chi, above.)

You will need six large heads of white cabbage, canning/pickling salt, a 5 gallon crock, a large stainless steel or glass bowl, a scale large enough to hold the bowl, a large cutting board, a good sharp knife, and two turkey roasting bags, with ties.

Place the crock on a thick folded towel in some corner of your kitchen where it won't be in your way. Crockers are porous, and will ooze some liquid. This is desirable, because the process removes air (and thereby unwanted bacteria) from the kraut as it ferments.

Remove the outer leaves of the cabbage, and any parts of the cabbage that have spots. Quarter the cabbage and cut out the core. Slice the cabbage fine, but not thin, about ½ inch. Strands that are too thin will become mushy; large chunks will not absorb the liquid.

To each pound of cut cabbage, add 2 teaspoons of salt and mix well with your hands. After mixing, place the cabbage in the crock and press it down with your fist, being careful not to bruise the cabbage. Continue until the crock is nearly full. By the time you are finished, the salt will have begun to draw liquid from the cabbage.

Put one turkey roasting bag inside the other. (I use these because they will not break.) Fill the nested bags with water, and close securely with a strong rubber band and ties or string. Place the bags on top of the cabbage so that it is completely covered.

Cover the crock with a clean towel. Check the kraut daily. If it is not covered with liquid by the next day, add brine – 2 tablespoons of salt dissolved in a quart of water. Remove any scum that forms.

The best sauerkraut is made at about 60 degrees and requires at least a month of fermentation. It can be cured in less time at higher temperatures, but will not be as good or hold as long.

When the kraut is done, there are many ways to preserve it. Freezing is the least desirable, because the kraut is mushy when thawed. It is possible to can it in a boiling water bath, but the cooking will kill the enzymes. I simply pack it into pint or quart canning jars, making sure the liquid covers the kraut (and adding brine, made as above, if I run out of juice), and capping with sterilized caps and lids. Store in a cool place. The kraut will stay crisp and delicious for nearly a year.

To Prepare

In order to preserve the enzymes, use as little heat as possible when you prepare sauerkraut for the table. Drain the kraut, and rinse thoroughly to get rid of the salt.

Sauté a diced onion in butter or olive oil. Add the kraut and sauté briefly. Add a chopped apple, a little caraway seed, and white wine. (You can use water or broth instead, but the wine lends an exquisite flavor to the dish.) Simmer briefly. I serve sauerkraut with a meat that will stand up to the cabbage flavor – beef roast or pork sausage, for example.

Bean Dip

I love making this with our students in the Ecological Food Production class. They get to eat the fresh and fermented results, and enjoy both.

2 C dried black beans
2 T whey or lemon juice
4 cloves garlic, diced
1 onion, diced

Soak beans in plenty of water overnight. Drain and discard water (this eliminates the sugars that make beans “gassy”). Place in a pot, cover with water, bring to a boil, and boil one minute. Remove from heat and let stand one hour. Drain and discard water. Add fresh water, whey or lemon juice, garlic and onion, and cook gently until beans are tender. Drain, reserving liquid. When beans are cool, process in a food processor, adding liquid through the feeding tube as necessary until you have a nice paste. Enjoy with chips as a snack or make a burrito by heating beans and rolling them up in a tortilla.

To ferment, place the prepared beans in a glass container, cover securely, and let them sit out for three days; then refrigerate. Fermentation adds all of the benefits noted above, and gives the bean dip a distinctive, pleasantly acidic flavor.

Fermented Pickles

Many food books that give recipes for fermented pickles call for using only water and dill and salt. I use many more ingredients:

In a quart jar, I place as many small pickling cucumbers as the jar will hold, or large pickling cucumbers, quartered and seeded. To that, I add

1 & ½ T pickling salt
½ tsp dill seed
1 T pickling spice
2 garlic cloves
1 head dill
1 tsp dill weed
1 tsp red pepper
1 C vinegar
1 C water

I cover the jar with a sterilized ring and lid, and place it in a cool place (below 50 degrees) and let it ferment!

For more information about the benefits and methods of fermenting foods and a vast number of easy recipes, see *Wild Fermentation* by Sandor Ellix Katz, *Truly Cultured* by Nancy Lee Bentley, and *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon. Even if you do not intend to ferment foods, these books are excellent. Anyone wishing to reconsider the industrialized diet will find them thought provoking and liberating.

Corned Beef

(This recipe comes from *The Joy of Cooking, 1975 edition.*)

This fermented beef got its name in Anglo Saxon times when a granular salt the size of a kernel of wheat – “corn” was used to process it.

A 5 lb piece of beef that is fibrous – hanging tender, brisket, or tongue, for example.

4 quarts hot water

2 C pickling or kosher salt

¼ C sugar

2 T pickling spice

The peeled cloves of a head of garlic

Combine the hot water, salt, sugar, and pickling spice. When cool, pour over a 5 lb piece of beef, which has been placed in a deep enameled pot or ceramic crock. Add the cloves of garlic. Put a plate over the meat to keep it submerged, and cover the pot. Cure in a cool place for three weeks, turning every five days.

To cook, rinse the meat well to remove the salt. Place in a pot and cover with boiling water and simmer, allowing about one hour per pound, until a fork can penetrate to the center. Slice it very thinly across the grain. Serve as a sandwich meat on dark rye bread or with cabbage wedges simmered the last fifteen minutes with the meat.

Fenalar – Brined Leg of Lamb

This is a traditional Norwegian recipe that one of Henning’s students passed on to us.

1 leg of lamb

First brine:

3 lbs pickling or kosher salt

1 heaping T sugar

½ C honey

1 C water

Mix together; ingredients will make a thick brine. Put the meat in a glass, stainless steel, or ceramic bowl and cover with the brine. Turn the meat and rub it several times a day for one week – the back of a wooden spoon to rub the brine into the meat works well. As the meat juices come out, the brine will thin and redden; continue to rub it in.

Second brine:

9 quarts water

6 lbs rock salt (if you use pickling or kosher salt instead, you will require a smaller amount, just enough to float a potato).

1 lb sugar

Mix together in a crock large enough to hold the leg of lamb and the brine. The flesh should be completely covered, although the bone may stick out. Let sit for one week (no need to rub any more).

After a week, discard the brine and wrap the leg in layers of cheesecloth, tie securely, and hang to dry in a cool, well ventilated place for three months or more. In the old days, people hung the fenalar for up to two years to allow the meat to achieve a dense texture and full flavor. The cheesecloth keeps the flies out. When the meat is cured, put it in the refrigerator, where it will keep beautifully for years. When serving, cut the meat perpendicular to the bone. Sliced fenalar dries out quickly, so slice only what you will consume that day.

Ceviche

This recipe is adapted from Nancy Lee Bentley's *Truly Cultured*.

Ceviche is a traditional Latin American “raw” fish dish. The acids in the lemon juice “cook” the fish. We include it here because, although we do not have red snapper on the farm, we buy it locally. It can serve as an appetizer, or as a main dish.

2 lb firm, fresh, deboned red snapper fillets, cut into ½ inch pieces
¾ C parsley, minced
½ C onion, minced
1 C fresh tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
1 Serrano chili, seeded and diced
2 tsp sea salt
1 C freshly squeezed lime and/or lemon juice

Place fish, onion, parsley, tomatoes, chili, and salt into a glass baking dish that will fit into your refrigerator. Pour the lemon/lime juice over the top, and mix the ingredients well. Marinate in the refrigerator for 4-6 hours, stirring each hour to be sure the fish is evenly coated with juices.

Grav Laks (Fermented Salmon)

We buy sockeye salmon from local fishers. Its firm meat makes it especially suited to this wonderful dish, which is a Norwegian specialty.

2 lbs center cut salmon fillets (2 pieces)
1 large bunch of dill, coarsely cut
1 T sugar
1 T salt
1&1/2 T ground black pepper
capers and lemon slices for serving

Remove bones from raw salmon. Rinse and pat dry.

Combine sugar, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle over flesh sides of fillets. Sprinkle plenty of dill over the top. Put flesh sides together, and sprinkle remaining dill on skin sides. Place in a glass baking dish and cover with plastic wrap. Put a stone, brick, or other

heavy weight on top. Refrigerate for 3-4 days, turning twice daily (there will be juices). Remove dill and scrape off some of the seasoning. When the grav laks is ready, slice thinly on bias.

To serve, place thinly sliced pumpernickel or rye bread on a small bed of lettuce, with salmon and capers on top. Sprinkle with mustard dressing and garnish with a slice of lemon. Or serve with warm potatoes and cucumber salad, and garnish with a sprig of dill and a slice of lemon.

Mustard Sauce

2 T Dijon mustard

1 T sugar

2 T vinegar

6 T olive oil

1 heaping T chopped fresh or dried dill weed

Mix mustard, sugar, and vinegar. Drizzle in oil slowly, beating as you go. Stir in chopped dill.

Recommended Sources

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