PRESERVING YOUR GARDEN GROWN PRODUCE

Spring and summer are wonderful times of the year to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables. Whether we are growing them in our gardens or getting a deal from a local farmer or store, it is great for our health and taste buds to eat seasonal produce. We often want to preserve some of these delicious foods for the rest of the year by canning or pickling fruits and vegetables. Some food preservation methods use a lot of added sugars or sodium, but many can be adapted to suit a healthy, diabetes-friendly diet.

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**PRODUCE, CONTINUED**

Did you know that the University of Georgia is home to the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP)? NCHFP is the leading source of research-based recommendations for most home food preservation methods. They have an easy to use website where you can find step-by-step instructions and recipes that have been tested and shown to be safe and delicious.

You can preserve your produce in healthy ways with basic kitchen equipment. A freezer, oven, and stove are all you need to get started. Let’s discuss three popular methods.

Freezing is one method of food preservation that can be accomplished with low to no added sugars or sodium. Some fruits and vegetables benefit from blanching before being frozen. Blanching is a step where vegetables are placed in boiling water or steam for a short period of time. This prevents loss of color, flavor, and texture after freezing.

After blanching, the vegetable is plunged into ice water to stop the cooking process. The vegetable is then placed on a baking sheet and frozen. This step prevents pieces from sticking or clumping together. Once they have frozen completely, they can be transferred to a freezer safe storage bag and labeled with the food name and date. Fruits and vegetables can be stored frozen at 0 degrees Fahrenheit indefinitely. For best quality, eat within 10–18 months.

Drying is another way to preserve fruits and vegetables without added sugar. Fruits may be pre-treated with ascorbic acid (vitamin C) or lemon juice to prevent browning. Mix one teaspoon of powdered ascorbic acid (or 3000mg of crushed ascorbic acid tablets) in two cups water. Place fruit in the solution for three to five minutes, then drain well. If using a commercial ascorbic acid product, follow manufacturer’s instructions.

Drying can be done using an oven at 140F or a dehydrator, a small appliance designed to heat to 140F with a small fan for circulating air. Dehydrators can dry larger amounts of food more quickly while using less energy than an oven.

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**PRODUCE, CONTINUED**

Nuts, seeds, and various types of fruits and vegetables can be dehydrated and eaten later.4 Most dried fruits can be stored for one year at 60 degrees Fahrenheit or six months at 80 degrees. Dried vegetables can be stored about half as long as dried fruits. If you want to store dried fruits or vegetables longer, place in the freezer.5 Mason or Ball jars are often a great storage container option since they keep humidity low and insects out.

Making jam or jelly is a third way to preserve seasonal fruits. Canning jams and jellies typically requires added sugar. This sugar helps keep the food safe and fresh over time. Sucralose (Splenda) does not provide the same preservation properties and cannot be safely substituted for sugar when using a water bath canner. If you wish to make lower sugar jams or jellies, you do have alternatives to traditional canning. Refrigerator jam or jelly is cooked on the stovetop and stored in the fridge. They are sometimes gelled with gelatin or sugar substitutes. *Note: jellies and jams made this way are not suitable for canning.5*

Not sure that freezing, drying, or making jam or jelly are for you? You can still reap the benefits of these lower sodium- and- sugar food preservation methods when shopping at the grocery store. Check out the side bar for foods to look for that are lower in added sugars and sodium.

**CHOOSING LOWER SALT AND SUGAR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES AT THE STORE**

- Frozen fruits without added sugars or syrups
- Frozen vegetables without sauces
- Unsweetened dried fruits
- Canned fruit packed in juice
- Canned beans and vegetables labeled “no added salt,” “no added sodium,” or “low in sodium.”
- Dry beans
- Products labeled “sugar free,” “no sugar added,” or “zero sugar.”
September is Emergency Preparedness Month, a national event to raise awareness about planning for emergencies and disasters, like floods, hurricanes, and pandemics, like covid-19. In the event of a natural disaster or other emergency, it is important to be ready to take care of our health. One way is to put together a diabetes care kit.

The CDC recommends keeping a list of medical information to have in case of emergency. The list should include the following:

- Copy of photo ID and health insurance cards
- Contact info for your medical providers
- List of current medications and dosages
- Make/model of insulin pump or continuous glucose monitor
- Insulin pump settings

Store the list in a waterproof plastic bag or container along with diabetes supplies in your kit. Emergency workers should be able to access the list quickly if needed.

Store 1–2 weeks’ worth of diabetes care supplies in your kit. Your kit will depend on your individual needs. Write down a list of supplies as you use them during the week and then put your emergency care supply kit together. Include your insulin pump, any extra disposable parts like lancets, syringes, and batteries, blood glucose meter, test strips, glucose tablets, any oral medication, alcohol wipes, and a sharps container to dispose of any used needles or lancets. Insulin should be stored in the refrigerator and used before its expiration date. Insulin stored at room temperature has a shorter shelf life of about one month.

Check your kit each month for items as they approach their expiration date. If all goes well, you won’t have to use the kit. When you buy new supplies, place them in the kit and use up the older ones. Store your kit in an easy-access location along with other emergency supplies like a first aid kit, flashlights, and batteries. Finally, don’t forget to talk to a friend or family member about the list and kit. It is important for someone else to know where to find them, too. Coordinate plans with people in your life, like family, friends, and neighbors.
The first version of the PreventT2 lessons came out in 2016. The PreventT2 lessons were based on the 2002 Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) research study. The DPP study compared a lifestyle change program to medication in the prevention of type 2 diabetes. The program was found to be more effective than taking metformin in reducing risk for type 2 diabetes.

The newest version released in 2022 has been updated to reflect new science in nutrition, exercise, and creating healthy habits.

The updated materials reflect a better understanding of how people change behavior. “I’m really enjoying the updated program,” said Beth Kindamo, a lifestyle change coach and DPP coordinator for UGA Cooperative Extension. “It puts what we know about making changes that last into practice. It is not willpower that leads to lasting success, but building habits and routine to support change.”

The lessons are also updated to share some of the benefits of exercise that have been discovered, like better sleep, lower anxiety, and less risk for some cancers.

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Updated Lessons, Continued

The nutrition information has been changed to be more flexible for individuals, with an increased focus on healthy eating patterns and whole foods.

The PreventT2 lessons are available in both English and Spanish. The Spanish language version was developed using examples of foods, food measurements, and physical activity that are more common in Spanish speaking cultures. People who speak Spanish as their first language helped guide these changes.

Diabetes affects more than 1 in 10 adults living in the US. Prediabetes comes before and affects 1 in 3 adults, but it can be reversed. Making changes like eating healthier and moving more can decrease your chances of getting diabetes. Consider if you or someone you know might have prediabetes and could use some help making changes to lower their chances of living with type 2 diabetes.

Want to learn more about the DPP and the PreventT2 lessons? UGA Extension has trained over 20 lifestyle change coaches in the state of Georgia to deliver this program to individuals with prediabetes. This includes those with a diagnosis of prediabetes from their medical provider, a history of gestational diabetes, or those who score 5 or more on the Pre-diabetes Risk Test. Not sure if you are at risk? Visit [https://www.cdc.gov/prediabetes/takethetest/](https://www.cdc.gov/prediabetes/takethetest/) to find out or snap a photo of the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.

You can connect with your UGA Extension DPP team at [www.extension.uga.edu](http://www.extension.uga.edu)
RECIPE CORNER: FREEZER JAM

Peach freezer jam
(yield: about 3 half-pint jars)

4 cups peeled and pitted peaches
3–4 teaspoons liquid artificial sweetener
1 tablespoon lemon juice
½ teaspoon ascorbic acid
1 ¾ ounce package powdered fruit pectin

Crush peaches in saucepan. Stir in sweetener, pectin, lemon juice, and ascorbic acid. Bring mixture to a boil; boil for one minute. Remove from heat. Continue to stir for two minutes. Pour into freezer safe containers, cover, and freeze. Thaw to enjoy and keep it stored in the refrigerator.

Strawberry freezer jam
(yield: 2–3 half-pint jars)

Yield: 2–3 half-pint jars
1 quart cleaned strawberries
3–4 teaspoons liquid artificial sweetener
1 package powdered fruit pectin
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Crush strawberries in 1 ½ quart saucepan. Stir in artificial sweetener, powdered fruit pectin, and lemon juice. Bring to a boil and boil for one minute. Remove from heat. Continue to stir for two minutes. Pour into freezer safe containers, cover, and freeze. Thaw to enjoy and keep it stored in the refrigerator.

Recipe source: NCHFP. So Easy to Preserve. 6th Edition. www.nchfp.uga.edu
REFERENCES

Dear Friend,

*Diabetes Life Lines* is a bi-monthly publication sent to you by your local county Extension agent.

It is written by an Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist and other health professionals from the University of Georgia. This newsletter brings you the latest information on diabetes self-management, healthy recipes, and news about important diabetes-related events.

If you would like more information, please contact your local county Extension Office.

Yours truly,

County Extension Agent

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