EXTENSION OFFERS CLASSES IN HOME FOOD PRESERVATION

The article for this week is contributed by my colleague Donielle Axline, 4H Youth Development Educator for University of Maryland Extension Frederick County.

Selecting fresh fruits and vegetables during the growing season from my garden or a local farm is one of my favorite past times during the summer and early Fall months. A few years ago I became very interested in preserving the fruits and vegetables I was growing for my family. I began freezing fresh berries and green beans and quickly ran out of room in the freezer. It was at that time I remembered my mother and grandmother used to can the produce from our garden.

After taking a class with some of my colleagues as a refresher for canning at home, I was quickly on my way to preserving my locally grown food for the upcoming year. Although canning is not a hard practice to learn, there are specific steps for one to follow in mastering the science of safe food preservation.

When using proper canning practices one should always:

- Carefully select and wash fresh food,
- Peel some fresh foods,
- Utilize hot packing for many foods,
- Add acids (lemon juice or vinegar) to some foods,
- Use acceptable jars and self-sealing lids,
- Process jars in a boiling-water or pressure canner for the correct period of time.

“Collectively, these practices remove oxygen; destroy enzymes; prevent the growth of undesirable bacteria, yeasts, and molds; and help form a high vacuum in jars. Good vacuums form tight seals which keep liquid in and air and microorganisms out” according to the National Center for Home Food Preservation (http://nchfp.uga.edu/index.html).

If learning safe food preservation techniques is an interest of yours, you can attend classes locally in Frederick through the University of Maryland Extension office.
on Montevue Lane. Four classes will be offered this spring. Pre-registration is required. Classes are $35 each or two for $60. Classes will be held on Tuesday, May 29th / Tuesday, June 5th from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. focused on Pressure Canning and Thursday, May 31st / Thursday, June 7th from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. focused on Water Bath Canning.

Classes for youth between the ages of 8 – 18 are also available on Saturday, June 9th. For more information or registration contact the Extension Office at 301-600-1589.

When canning always use a certified tested recipe. This will ensure consistency and most important a safe product for your family or friends. One of my favorite recipes is Blueberry – Spice Jam, from the So Easy to Preserve 5th Edition cookbook published by The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

**BLUEBERRY – SPICE JAM**
(about 5 half-pint jars)

2 1/2 pints ripe blueberries  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg or cinnamon  
5 1/2 cups sugar  
3/4 cup water  
1 box powdered pectin

Sterilize canning jars. Wash and thoroughly crush blueberries, one layer at a time, in a saucepan. Add lemon juice, spice and water. Stir in pectin and bring to a full rolling boil over high heat, stirring frequently. Add the sugar and return to a full rolling boil. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; quickly skim off foam. Pour jam immediately into hot jars, leaving ¼ - inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process 5 minutes in a Boiling Water Bath.

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