

Item for the post – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – K-State Research & Extension – Cottonwood District

Food Preservation is a Hot Topic

Gardens are producing and Farmer's Market bins are full of beautiful vegetables. It's that time of year to get the canner out of the cupboard. Common questions at this time of year at the Extension Office relate to the recommended canning practices. Whether you are canning for the first time or have years of experience, it is a good idea to reinforce correct procedures.

K-State Research and Extension has provided hands-on food preservation workshops in the past. While we do not have a workshop scheduled this year I am happy to steer people to one of the best canning guides I have found titled, "So Easy to Preserve" from the University of Georgia. It is a wonderful guide with question and answer sections at the end of each chapter. We have several copies available for sale for \$16.25 at our Hays and Great Bend offices.

One question I was asked recently was, "Are citric acid and ascorbic acid interchangeable?" In food preservation, citric acid and ascorbic acid are two types of acid used for two different functions. While both are acids, they are not the same. Their chemical structures are slightly different, which leads to different functionality. Citric acid is more acidic than ascorbic acid. Therefore, citric acid is recommended when canning tomatoes to lower the pH or increase acidity. It is a small amount that works effectively. It would take a lot more ascorbic acid to equal the power of citric acid to acidify tomatoes properly. Then flavor would be compromised. Ascorbic acid, also known as 'fruit fresh' is better at protecting color changes in certain foods like apples, peaches and pears.

People are always looking for shortcuts when food preservation is concerned. Unless food is preserved in some manner, it begins to spoil soon after it is harvested. This spoilage is caused by microorganisms; physical damage such as bruising, water loss, or punctures; or by

chemical changes such as those caused by enzymes. Enzymes are the chemical substances in foods that help them to grow and mature. If the enzymes in fruits and vegetables are not inactivated, they continue to work after harvest, causing flavor and texture changes. Enzymes can be inactivated by blanching, which is a quick method when the food is held at boiling temperatures for a specified period of time.

Blanching is something many people want to skip, but I encourage them not to. Blanching just takes a few minutes. Once the food has been held in boiling water for a few minute, (usually less than 5) you will want to put it in ice water for the same number of minutes. It is an important step that really should not be skipped.

Please note that some foods may be better suited for canning; others for freezing or drying. Consider how you would prefer to store your finished products, how much it will cost and how your family will like the product.

Remember, I have a testing device to check the accuracy of your pressure canner. We can check dial gauges in a matter of minutes, so give Berny or me a call at either the Hays or Great Bend offices and we can set up a time to test your gauge. There is no charge for this service.

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