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www.potomacvegetablefarms.com
pvfnewsletter@gmail.com

How Do You Put Food Away for Later?



Pesto and Sauce – Cristina Miller

Last year was my first year at PVF, and I learned a lot about growing, harvesting, and selling vegetables. But one of the lessons that stuck with me was something simpler: I developed a deeper appreciation for the seasons.

When you work on a farm, you become very aware that vegetables have their moment. For a few weeks, something can be everywhere. You harvest it, wash it, pack it, sell it—and sometimes wonder what you are possibly going to do with any more of it. Then, suddenly, the season is over. And if you want that same fresh, nutrient-dense vegetable again, you have to wait until next year. Or do you?

This year, I started wondering what I could put away now so I could enjoy some of the farm in the dead of winter. The obvious answer was canning.

Unfortunately, canning and I are not quite ready for each other. It seems like a lot of work, and as a relatively accident-prone person who is completely unskilled in the art of canning—and who also has a newly remodeled kitchen—I decided that particular adventure could wait.

But preserving food doesn't have to mean canning. The basil this year was amazing, so I started there. A friend told me about the recipes in *The Pesto Manifesto*, and I made a big batch of pesto. I filled a Mason jar for the refrigerator and put the rest into freezer bags. Just like that, some of this summer's basil was headed for winter.

That gave me a little confidence, so I tried something bigger. I gathered garlic, onions, bell peppers, and 25 pounds of tomatoes (which is a lot of tomatoes) and roasted everything in the oven. Then I turned it into

pasta sauce, seasoning it with fresh and dried basil, oregano, and garlic powder. I kept the seasoning fairly simple because I can always add more when I use it later. One Mason jar went into the refrigerator, and the rest went into several freezer bags.

Was it some work? Yes. But it wasn't complicated. I didn't need special equipment, or to become an expert at food preservation. I just needed vegetables, an oven, a blender, some freezer space, and a few hours.

And that's what I hope others will take from this. You don't have to preserve everything. You don't have to learn to can. You don't have to spend an entire weekend doing it. Pick one thing you really love when it is abundant and at its best, and find a simple way to save some for later.

A few months from now, when the fields look very different and fresh tomatoes and basil are a distant memory, I'll be able to pull a bag of sauce or pesto out of my freezer. I'll have something nutritious and delicious that came from vegetables harvested at the height of their season.

And maybe that's one more lesson the farm has taught me: when the season gives you something good, enjoy as much of it as you can—and save a little for later.

Freezing – Rachel McCormick

The simplest way I know to preserve tomatoes is by freezing them. Just chop up the seconds tomatoes. No need to even cook them down. Put them into plastic ziplock freezer bags...I use quart size. I like to put basil in mine if I remember to bring some home. It is really easy. You can probably add other seasonings

or vegetables to the bags but this year I made it very basic. You may have to find room in your freezer. I removed all those extra ripe bananas which I froze... another easy preservation technique...just pop the whole rotting banana in the freezer for later. Now it's time to make banana bread. You will be happy to have these easy to preserve tomatoes for soup and stews in the coming year. Enjoy!



Canning: A Personal History – Becky Crouse

I began canning tomatoes before I worked on the farm. My ex boyfriend's family were big preservers, and he and I both worked at the farmers' markets year round and so we had access to good vegetables.

Once I moved to and worked on the farm, I had access to good vegetables all the time. I still canned tomatoes—mostly sauce and salsa—but my horizons expanded exponentially. I pickled cucumbers, beets, beans, okra, and carrots. I canned jalapenos. There were tomatoes, whole and processed, and fruit! I got a dehydrator and dried herbs.

In my best canning year ever, I made and canned: savory pickled beets, canned peaches and pears in syrup, dilly beans, pickled

okra, salsa, apple butter, whole tomatoes, tomato sauce, and jalapenos. I still keep that list on my refrigerator because it was such a productive year! It was also before I got married and had kids. Herbs were not recorded, but I also froze onions, peppers, hot peppers, greens, and green beans.

These days, my kids and husband prefer refrigerator pickles, which is fine with me. There aren't typically enough jalapenos to process. And, due to life changes, my strategies have changed. This year, an excellent tomato year, I roasted and froze about 20 bags of tomatoes in varying sizes. I canned salsa and tomato sauce. I still hope to make savory pickled beets using the beets from my garden. And I did make a small batch of tomato jam, which I highly recommend... especially if you eat it on a BLT. The tomatoes now coming in from

my home garden will go in the freezer, whole, and I will figure out what to do with them later. All herbs from either the farm or my garden are bunched and hung. The dehydrator is stored on a high shelf and destined to be given away.

I miss those days of canning everything in sight. But, I do have to say, I gifted a lot of the bounty and, of what I kept, not all got used (especially the frozen greens and peppers or sweeter recipes). Now simplicity is the key, but it doesn't make the outcome any less delicious. Preserving the food that you will eat is the goal. It's not about how you preserve it, but simply what you have the capacity to do and what your household will eat. Anything beyond that is meant to be enjoyed while it is available and looked forward to in coming seasons.

Canning (So Satisfying) – Hana Newcomb

A fellow PVF worker taught me how to can tomatoes in one afternoon – in 1989. We have been canning sauce and soup and whole peeled and stewed tomatoes in our house ever since. It is a ritual of late summer. For the last three Mondays, our kitchen has been a mess, and at the end of the day, the counter is full of jars cooling, the lids popping as they seal.

Boiling water in a pot with a strainer insert, ice water in the sink, chopped onions and celery on the counter, and tomatoes in every pot and bowl, waiting for the next steps. It is actually easiest to work alone because I can zip from the stove to the sink with my dripping pot of steamed tomatoes, then I can go back and forth without worrying about burning a bystander.

It is really not hard. It takes some equipment but you only have to buy it once. We use a pressure canner that we bought 37 years ago, but lots of people use a big pot of boiling water. You need jars, lids, rings, a funnel, and some big bowls or pots. I am so sure you can learn everything on YouTube by now.

My husband makes all the sauce these days. In a big roasting pan, he cuts up tomatoes in big chunks. No peeling, just taking out the bad



spots. He adds some onions, garlic, peppers, salt, basil. Roasts them at 425 degrees for a few hours, until the tops are a little bit black. Uses the immersion blender right in the pan and the sauce is done. It is as simple as it can possibly be. We learned this from Becky years ago and sauce is now the easiest tomato product we make.

My favorite is tomato soup. It is a delicacy in January: the bold and beautiful taste of summer. I used a recipe for stewed tomatoes from *The Joy Of Cooking* (37 years ago) and turned it into soup by blending it. Blanch tomatoes in boiling water for a minute, peel.

Add some onions and celery, salt and sugar, Italian seasoning. Blend. Cook in a heavy pot for a little while so it's not too juicy, but don't turn it into sauce.

The beauty of canning instead of freezing is you don't need to rely on freezer space or uninterrupted electricity – plus you get to admire your jars of deeply colorful tomatoes on the shelf all winter long. When we go on a road trip, we load up with our jars of tomato soup and sauce to distribute to friends and family. Our freezer is full of other goodies, but tomatoes go in jars at our house.



Dehydrating – Lova Andersson

While I pickle and can a lot, I have found that my favorite and simplest way of preserving food is actually dehydrating. A few years ago I picked up a cheap countertop dehydrator at the thrift store. Since then I have dehydrated countless different types of things. Berries, herbs, fruit, various veggies for soup packs, hot peppers, and lots of different organ meats for my dog... who thinks it's his own personal treat dispenser. I find that dehydrating takes up very little space compared to cans or freezing things, and much less likely to make a mess, and is an incredibly simple process.

Canning for 11 Weeks Without Stopping – Anna Newcomb

It all started in 2018 when Hana turned to us and said, “You know, it’s not that hard to can tomatoes. You already know how to make jam, and canning these seconds would be much more helpful.” She shared her approach*, suggesting that we be good citizens by reducing PVF waste, and that we would make our family very happy.

So, we started small with tinfoil turkey roasting pans, a small pressure cooker, and jars procured from Hana’s basement. We cut and roasted and jarred and boiled our way to a few dozen quarts and felt quite smug. But then, having discovered the joys of insta-presents at Christmas and the satisfaction of saving a few bushels from the compost pile, we

decided we were master canners. We purchased special knives, solid roasting pans, dozens of cases of jars, and 1000 fancy one-piece canning tops. A new 40,000BTU outdoor propane burner, propane oven, and 60-quart pot found a home on our porch. We were all in.

By Covid-times we were roasting a bushel of tomatoes overnight

and jarring/canning them every morning. We even had a cabinet maker design and install special cherry shelving in our basement for our annual haul – we wanted only the best home for our tomatoes. Over the years we have become known for our home cannery, and it is impossible to miss. The neighborhood fragrance is part Italian-restaurant,

part fresh compost from July 19 to October 8 (we keep meticulous records) and our friends, neighbors, visitors, family, coworkers, and passers-by rarely leave the house empty handed. We aim to be able to say, “Not a single tomato was wasted this year” and Hana (perhaps just to make us feel good) claims that we have a near perfect record.



**Cut up your tomatoes in large chunks – no peeling or seeding or other fussy stuff. Put them in a roasting pan with basil, onions, garlic (all PVF all the time), salt and olive oil. Roast at 280 degrees overnight, then pour into jars for their water bath in the morning. It takes about 30 minutes/bushel to prep – best done while listening to your book on tape. They boil for 45 minutes, which is just the right amount of time for your morning jog.*

No Fuss Stewing and Freezing – Michael Lipsky

“Make hay while the sun shines,” as the saying goes. Put up, freeze or dry whatever’s in abundance, the sayer might continue.

In our house we like to freeze fruit when it is ripe and readily available. On the farm, those opportunities come along every year.

This year a fruit grower at one of the markets we sell at was happy to give us a bushel of peaches that were getting to be too ripe to sell to his customers. At home we washed them, cut out overripe spots, removed the pits and cut the peaches into chunks. We then simmered them in about an inch

of water in a large pot. We then added some raisins for sweetness. Soon the peaches were ready to be transferred to containers and bags, to be stored in our freezer for winter feasting (or next week’s meal, if we can’t wait).

I’ve had stewed peaches with their skins carefully removed after blanching. If you have nothing better to do, removing the skins might be fun and rewarding. At our house we stew the peaches with the skins on.

We put up tomatoes more or less the same way, except for the raisins. Using ‘seconds’ tomatoes, we cut out any bruises or rotten areas, and the ‘scars’ where the tomatoes were attached to the plant. Sometimes we stew the

tomatoes with minced garlic or salt, but those and other ingredients can be added later.

In comparison to the peaches, stewed tomatoes have a lot of excess juice to pour off, to be used for other dishes, or to be consumed on the spot after cooling.

I’ve discovered I greatly prefer sauce made with fresh tomatoes compared to the tomato sauces available from the supermarket. The supermarket versions are too thick for my taste. I like pairing pasta with the juicy, simmered fresh tomatoes, rather than with the thicker, more ‘pasty’ sauce that has become the national norm.