

Cooperative Extension

Preserve the Harvest

Daryl Minch, M.Ed., CFCS, Family & Community Health Sciences Educator, Somerset County

What tastes better in January than homemade spaghetti sauce or strawberry jam? Many people enjoy freezing, canning or drying the abundance of summer vegetables and fruits to savor during the rest of the year. Home food preservation is fun, but requires knowledge and following specific procedures to ensure a high quality and safe product.

Learn the craft

The best ways to learn about home preservation are to take a class, view videos and/or read an up-to-date book. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and food preservation product companies such as the Ball Company* thoroughly test their recipes for safety and quality. Recipes or directions found in old cookbooks or on the web or from friends may or may not be safe. Cooperative Extension strongly recommends only using tested recipes and procedures. A list of resources is at the end of this article.

Start with the best produce

Food preservation allows us to save fresh food to enjoy at a later date. Freezing, canning and drying do not improve the flavor or quality of food, so always start with fresh, high quality produce. Do not try to preserve poor quality food, such as produce with soft spots, insect damage or from frost-killed vines. Preserving fresh foods also helps maintain the nutritional profile of the food.

Freezing

Freezing is an easy way to preserve food and requires no special equipment. Most vegetables need to be blanched (submerged in boiling water for a specified time, then cooled rapidly) to prevent textural and quality changes. Consult charts with blanching times for different vegetables. Fruits may be frozen plain, in juice or with various amounts of sugar or sugar syrups. The sugar helps improve texture and color in some fruit. Some fruits, like peaches, need an antioxidant such as ascorbic acid or Fruit Fresh™* to prevent darkening. The recipe will provide guidance. Freeze food in plastic bags labeled for freezing or in rigid plastic containers.

Canning in Jars

Canning must be done correctly to ensure a safe product and prevent foodborne illness, including botulism. It requires specific equipment.

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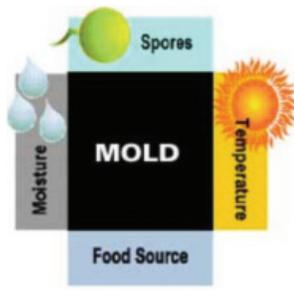


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There's Mold on My Food, Should I Throw it Away?

Debra M. Palmer, Ph.D., Associate Professor/Extension Specialist in Community Nutrition, Rutgers Cooperative Extension



Americans throw away hundreds of hard-earned dollars by purchasing food that we let go bad. How often have you looked in the back of your cheese drawer and seen a little green on the edge of that two pound block of expensive Swiss cheese you received over the holidays, or found a little extra fuzz on that peach at the bottom of the fruit drawer? Perhaps you've pick up that loaf of bread it seems you bought only a few days back and seen the mold on the outside slices, only two, and wondered, "can I still eat the good ones?" Should you throw these foods away? After all, isn't cheese made from mold anyway? Maybe it's OK to eat them; maybe not.

When it comes to cheese the answer depends on the type. Molds used when cheese is manufactured are harmless, but molds that grow on cheese can harbor harmful bacteria. When it comes to hard cheeses like hard Cheddar, Colby, or Swiss, it is safe to eat them, so long as you can remove at least an inch from the site where you see the mold growing. However, if there is ANY mold on softer cheeses like blue cheese, Soft Brie, or ricotta, throw them away! The same goes for other soft dairy products like yogurts and sour cream.

Fruits and vegetables are a lot like cheeses; sometimes you can save them, sometimes you can't. Dense, low-moisture vegetables and fruits like carrots and jicama are safe to eat if

you are able to remove at least one-inch of the produce from the molded portion. However, juicier, less dense fruits and vegetables like cucumbers and peaches may very well be contaminated below the surface – even if you can't see it, so you'd be best off discarding them.

Since bread is very porous, a loaf of bread that shows any mold on it likely has spores throughout that you just can't see. In this case "Green means go" ...straight into the garbage!

As is so often the case, when it comes to keeping foods safe, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Try to buy only what you will be able to eat before it goes bad. Keep fruits and vegetables where you can see them rather than hidden in the bottom drawer where you might forget they are there. Use the less visible locations in your fridge to house less healthy, sugar-laden treats and you'll not only increase the likelihood that you'll finish off your produce before it goes bad, but you'll also likely help improve your family members health by keeping those treats "out of sight, and out of mind." Also, to prevent the growth of mold on cheese always refrigerate it, and don't ever allow it to sit at room temperature for longer than two hours.

Stay safe by following these guidelines, but also follow the best food safety rule of them all...when in doubt, **THROW IT OUT!**



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Encourage Healthy Eating at a Young Age

Hannah Bolinger and Donald W. Schaffner, Ph.D., *Extension Specialist in Food Safety, Rutgers Cooperative Extension*



Children can be picky eaters, which can be incredibly frustrating for parents. If you're looking for a fun way to introduce more vegetables into your children's diet, consider buying a portion of your groceries from local farmer's markets. Children love the open-air atmosphere and can be more willing to try foods when they are involved in the decision of picking out which items to buy.

Try preparing your child's veggies in different ways:

Top miniature pizzas with arugula, stuff artichokes with breadcrumbs and cheese, slice carrots and sauté with butter, fresh ginger, and honey, grate zucchini into spaghetti sauce, or provide fun dipping sauces for your child to experiment with.

Just by introducing new flavors to your child, you can help them develop a taste for vegetables that can impact them throughout their lives. And of course, there are a few guidelines to help in this process. Most experts agree that forcing a child to try a dish only creates a negative attitude toward trying new foods in the future. A hands-off approach lets your child experiment with new foods without feeling pressured to do anything scary i.e. putting something unfamiliar into their mouths. Some researchers believe that a child may need to try a food up to twenty times before they decide if they do or do not like the taste. If your child spits out a bite of their food, that is completely natural and is their way of exploring their environment. By providing new foods in each meal along with old favorites, a child can be encouraged to try new flavors. Again, being an active part of the selection of foods, as well helping in the preparation, can encourage a child to give a new food a try because they have already invested some amount of energy and interest to this food. You may have your child rinse the produce or pull off stems and leaves.

In addition to not forcing your child to try new foods, try not to use food as a reward for good behavior. Food should be a non-issue. Try to set a good example to your child by eating a variety of fruits and vegetables. Sometimes older siblings can hinder a younger child trying new foods with comments like "that's gross". Have a talk with older children about setting a good example. Explain to them that talking in a negative way does not encourage their younger sibling to try new foods and while it is fine for them to have an opinion they need to keep it to themselves.

Let's try to make this spring a time to introduce your child to the goodness of vegetables.



Here are just a few of the fruits and vegetables you can expect to see at this season's spring-time farmer's markets:

- Artichokes
- Baby carrots
- Arugula as well as many other salad greens
- Peas
- Radishes
- Strawberries
- Asparagus



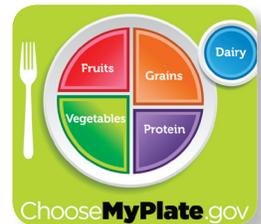
Strategies to Consume More and Weigh Less

Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS, Family and Community Health Sciences Educator, Union County

There are many methods that you can use to increase bulk in your diet so your meals are more satisfying and filling. Fruits and vegetables in puree or chopped forms can be added to smoothies, quick breads, main dishes, or desserts. Try adding pumpkin puree to muffins or loaf bread and chopped zucchini or butternut squash to meat loaf or macaroni and cheese. Doing this cuts calories, adds bulk to your diet, and increases your fruit and vegetable intake which is needed by most Americans. Here are some additional tips to eat foods that are low in calories and high in density:



- **Pay attention to your hunger and feelings of fullness** and stop eating when full. Don't eat when you are not hungry and be a mindful eater.
- **Add fruit and vegetables to traditional dishes** to stretch them along with adding fiber which makes you feel more full and satisfied.
- **Start each main meal with a cup of vegetable soup or a side green salad.** Both add bulk but few calories. Remember to choose a low-fat salad dressing and use a small amount.
- **Use salsa as a dressing for salads or on a baked potato.** It adds vegetables to your diet and is low in calories as compared to other dressings like sour cream or creamy salad dressings.
- **Drink water** rather than juices or sweetened beverages at meals or in-between.
- **Fill half your lunch and dinner plate with fruits and vegetables.** Go online to Choose MyPlate.gov <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/> to learn more about preparing healthy meals and snacks.
- **Set a good example** for children by eating fruit everyday with meals or as snacks.
- **When eating out, order a salad or extra vegetable** rather than a starchy food.
- **Eat a high fiber, low calorie snack** like an apple before you go out to eat. Go into the restaurant feeling satisfied, not hungry and you will consume fewer calories overall.
- **For snacks, choose a high fiber fruit or vegetable** and pair it with a low-fat dairy product. For example, low-fat yogurt with fresh berries, or baby carrots and low-fat ranch dip. Snacks need to keep calories around 100 to 150 and add to the nutritional intake of your diet instead of just adding more fat, salt, sugar, or calories.
- **Explore different meal and snack patterns.** Choose a pattern that includes at least 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables each day. Eat more whole grains by substituting a whole-grain product for a refined product – such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice. It's important to substitute the whole-grain product for the refined one, rather than adding the whole-grain product.
- **Research has shown most of us eat the same amount of food by weight each day.** If you increase the water and bulk in your meals and snacks, you will eat a similar amount of food but fewer calories. In the end you will feel full and lose weight at the same time.



Make these small changes and you can lose those extra pounds before swimsuit season starts this year!

Grow Healthy Team Nutrition Welcomes Returning Schools

Michelle Brill, MPH, Family and Community Health Sciences Educator, Mercer County

Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS) is happy to announce that four elementary schools have been awarded mini-grants to continue participation in Grow Healthy Team Nutrition, a garden-enhanced school-wide wellness initiative through 2014. They are: Aura School in Elk Township (Gloucester County), Cape May City Elementary School (Cape May County), Francis A. Desmares School in Flemington (Hunterdon County), and Ethel McKnight Elementary School in East Windsor (Mercer County). These schools have demonstrated successes involving teachers, administration, foodservice, students, families and volunteers working together to make their schools healthier. Grow Healthy focuses on: foodservice training, garden-enhanced nutrition education, and the school wellness environment.



FCHS implements the Grow Healthy project with funding from a USDA Team Nutrition Training Grant awarded to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Bureau of School Nutrition.

Congratulations to all!



Getting Wealthy One Small Step at a Time

Barbara O'Neill, Ph.D., CFP®, Extension Specialist in Financial Resource Management, Rutgers Cooperative Extension

The publication of the second edition of the **Small Steps to Health and Wealth™** workbook is a good time to revisit the basic premise of this program. Small daily behavior changes in health and personal finance practices can have a major positive impact on people's lives. So what's stopping you from becoming healthy and wealthy? For many people, it's one or more of the following: denial, environmental influences, fear, lack of specific goals, negative thought patterns, not knowing where to get started, and other people (e.g., family and friends).

Once you identify your obstacles to positive behavior change, make plans to overcome them. For example, request information about your employer's retirement savings plan and develop specific financial goals (e.g., "invest \$100 per month in a 401(k) at work"). Not sure where to begin? Consider these strategies from the **Small Steps to Health and Wealth™** workbook.



- **Track household spending for a month or two** by writing down the amount spent and the expense category (e.g., gas for car). Use this information to develop a spending plan (budget) that includes savings for financial goals and where **income = expenses + savings**.



- **Place two dollars a day, plus pocket change, in a can or jar.** At the end of a month, you'll have about \$80 to \$100 accumulated. Save this money in a bank account or, better still, if you have credit card debt, add it to the minimum payment due on a credit card. One of the best "investments" people can make is to use their savings to pay off outstanding credit card bills with double-digit interest rates.



- **Set up "automated routines" for investing.** For example, have money directly debited each month from your bank account to purchase shares in a stock index fund or stock from companies with a dividend reinvestment plan (DRIP). You won't miss what you don't have.



- **Participate in a retirement savings plan at work (e.g., 401(k) or 403(b) plan).** If you're not currently enrolled, sign up and start saving. If you're currently saving, save 1% more of your pay. Try to save at least the amount required to earn the maximum savings match from your employer (e.g., 6% of pay). This is "free money" that, unfortunately, many workers pass up.

www.asec.org

- **Complete the Ballpark Estimate retirement planning worksheet** developed by the American Savings Education Council (see www.asec.org) to get a rough estimate of what you need to save to fund your retirement. Try several scenarios until you arrive at an affordable savings figure.



Small consistent action steps can lead to financial success. Save what you can right now (e.g., 2% of your salary) and, when you are able to save more (e.g. 3% or 4%), just do it. No step is too small to get started on the path to financial security and you can never be too early or too late. Whatever you do to improve your health or finances is better than doing nothing. What you think about, you bring about!

Preserve the Harvest - continued from page 1



The canning method, procedures and processing times are scientifically determined for each food. Always follow the recipe exactly and do not change anything! Do not make up your own recipes. These are general guidelines:

- The recipe will say whether to use a water bath or pressure canner based on the acidity of the food. These are the only approved canning methods and they are not interchangeable in a recipe.
 - ✓ Fruits, figs (with added acid), tomatoes (with added acid) and pickles are high acid foods that are processed in a boiling water bath.
 - ✓ Fruit spreads (jams, jellies) are processed in a water bath. Paraffin is not recommended to seal these products.
 - ✓ Vegetables, meat, seafood, poultry and mixtures of these foods are low acid foods and must be processed in a pressure canner.
- Dial gauge pressure canners should have the gauge tested annually for accuracy.
- Use two piece canning lids.
- All tomato products – juice, whole, cut – must have acid added to ensure safety. Add 1 tablespoon of bottled lemon juice to each pint jar or 2 tablespoons of lemon juice to each quart jar.
- Stay in the kitchen to monitor the canner. Be sure the water remains at a boil in the water bath canner or that the pressure stays at the specified level in a pressure canner. Process the jars for the time in the recipe.



Drying

An electric food dehydrator is needed for drying food in New Jersey. Oven drying is inefficient except for herbs and drying food out-of-doors does not work in our humid climate. Read and follow the directions that come with the dehydrator. It takes from several hours to one day to dry different foods. Some foods require blanching and others need pretreating to prevent darkening, so follow the recipe. Store dried foods in plastic or glass jars or in plastic freezer bags.

How long does it keep?

- Use a thermometer to insure your freezer is at 0° F or lower. Frozen foods have the best quality if used within one year. Frozen foods do not spoil, but they dry out (freezer burn), get tough and may not taste good.
- Store home canned foods in a cool, dark place and use within one year. Discard if the jar is no longer sealed or the lid is bulging or leaking. Discard food if it looks moldy, has an unnatural color or has rising bubbles. When opening the jars check for off odors or mold or spurting liquid. These are signs of spoilage. Discard spoiled food and containers safely.
- Store dried foods in a cool, dark place and check periodically for any signs of moisture in the container or for mold. Discard if damp or moldy. Use dried food within one year.
- Consult Home Storage of Foods: Refrigerator and Freezer Storage (Rutgers Cooperative Extension bulletin E340).

Reliable resources

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How to Recipe Books

- *Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving* (2009 edition or later).
- *So Easy to Preserve*, 5th Edition, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, \$18. Phone: 706-542-2657 or website, <http://www.soeasytopreserve.com>. A DVD is also available.
- *Complete Guide to Home Canning*, 2009 revision, USDA Bulletin No. 539. Download PDF from <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>
- *Putting Food By*, Fifth Edition. Greene, Hertzberg & Vaughan. The Stephen Greene Press, Lexington, MA, 2010.

Websites: tested recipes, "how to" videos, printable factsheets and more:

- Ball: <http://www.freshpreserving.com/>
- USDA's National Center for Home Food Preservation: <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp>



*Does not imply endorsement or discrimination of specific companies.