

Are you ready to join the Canolution?

Written by By CINDY WELCH, News-Telegram Food Columnist
Friday, 11 September 2009 10:40



In cities across America, groups large and small joined together to host canning parties in August. More parties are planned in September. People are beginning to remember the joy of eating produce from local gardens and orchards and discovering the pleasure of preserving those products for colder days and long winter nights.

Like many of you, I remember late summer-early fall days with my grandmothers putting up corn, peaches, pickles, pickled okra, while turning tomatoes and peppers into homemade salsa.

My grandfather had his “little garden” that was at least an acre. He loved to try at least one new item every year. He made his own berry wines and we even got loofah sponges made from loofah gourds for Christmas one year.

Preserving the garden was not only a necessity, it was a source of social interaction, a rite of passage and a family tradition. Every kid had to learn to cut peppers and okra in the garden without slicing off a finger. Shucking and scraping the corn kernels off the cobs began when you were strong enough to pull.

My parents continued the tradition with sun pickles and dried apricots. My risk-taking and creative father decided that it would be faster to dry the apricots on the roof. I still remember them being covered with cheesecloth and hoping the birds wouldn't end up eating all of them. Those were the most wonderful apricot fried pies I've ever eaten.

You don't have to bring in an acre harvest to try preserving some of your favorite fruits. There are several books that give great ideas for preserving in small batches. One of my favorites is “Fine Preserving” by Catherine Plagemann and annotated by M. F. K. Fisher. It has recipes for wonderful items such as onion vinegar and thyme jelly. I may never get around to making them, but reading the stories and the recipes make my mouth hum with anticipation.

On the practical side, my favorite book is “The Complete Book of Year Round Small-Batch Preserving” by Ellie Topp and Margaret Howard.

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There are scrumptious recipes for infused oils, salsas, sauces, chutneys, pickles as well as jams, jellies, marmalades and fruit butters. All of the recipes are possible with a relatively small amount of produce and generate batches the right size to keep your family happy without filling up your pantry.

The ladies end the book with a chapter on how to use their goodies in recipes. What a bonus for a foodie.

I really like the mango chutney. I blend it with cream cheese to create a sandwich spread for turkey and greens in pita bread. I also made the Asian Plum Sauce recipe to put up some wonderful local plums given to me by friends several years ago.

Not sure where to start and don't know how much of an investment you want to make in jars, tools and kettles? Below are a few recipes that can be made from pre-prepped items.

Your major investment will be some jars that can be found in the canning products. You can decide if this is something you would enjoy or if you just enjoy eating the results of someone else's experiments. Either way, you have some great gifts to give to friends and family.

Sweet and Spicy Sliced Dill Pickles or Fire and Ice Pickles

1 gallon sour dill pickles, sliced (hamburger dills are okay)

4 pounds sugar

2 teaspoons minced garlic

2 teaspoons Tabasco sauce

Drain the jar of pickles and set empty jar to the side. Place one fourth of the pickles back in the jar.

Layer with one fourth of the sugar, one half teaspoon of the garlic, and one half teaspoon of the Tabasco sauce.

Repeat the layering process.

Seal the jar with the lid and refrigerate.

Twice a day, for four days, turn the jar over to mix and combine the ingredients in the jar.

Divide into smaller jars to give away.

Microwave Peach Jam

3 cups chopped fresh or frozen peaches

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2 cups granulated sugar
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons orange juice

Place peaches and sugar in an 8 cup microwaveable container.

Stir in lemon juice. Microwave on high, uncovered, for seven minutes, stirring twice. Microwave again on high for 12-15 minutes, uncovered, or until mixture will form a *gel upon cooling.

Stir in orange juice. Ladle into sterilized jars and process as directed by instructions with jars.

**A gel will form when the liquid will drop in sheets from a cold-spoon dipped into the jam.*

Cranberry Apple Butter

6 cups cranberry apple-sauce
2 cups sugar
2 tablespoons cinnamon
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar

Combine all ingredients and place in slow cooker on high. Cook for several hours until desired thickness is reached. Pour into sterilized jars. Cool. Refrigerate and use within two weeks

Tomorrow's breakfast may include fig jam from the tried and true recipe of a Hopkins County native or pumpkin butter from a friend who decided to try something new with the pumpkin from her garden.

Both ladies have signed on and either way, my biscuits will be blessed. Are you ready to join the Canolution?

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For the past 20 years, Cindy Welch has been involved with all aspects of cooking, including formal culinary training, experience as food service director for First Baptist Church of Euless, a personal chef and owner of Cindy's Casa Cuisine. Cindy's favorite hobby is "providing delicious food for "the people of Sulphur Springs."