

Giardiniera

This classic Italian pickle, which makes a great antipasto, contains an array of vegetables preserved to maintain their distinctive flavors and textures. The recipe is flexible: use asparagus or green beans for any of the vegetables, or lemon thyme for the oregano.

In a large nonreactive bowl, combine the zucchini and celery. Add 1 Tbs. of the salt and the ice cubes. Cover and refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours. Drain, rinse and then drain well.

Have ready 6 hot, sterilized 1-pint jars and their lids.

In a large nonreactive saucepan, combine the vinegar and the remaining 1 Tbs. salt. Add 3 cups water and bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring to dissolve the salt.

Meanwhile, cut each bell pepper half into 4 rectangles. Cut the carrots into sticks about ¼ inch thick and at least ½ inch shorter than the height of the jars.

In each jar, place 1 oregano sprig, 3 garlic cloves, 1 bay leaf and ½ tsp. peppercorns. Divide the zucchini, celery, bell peppers, carrots and cauliflower among the jars, filling them within 1 inch of the rims.

Ladle the hot brine into the jars, leaving ½ inch of headspace and adding more vinegar if needed. Remove any air bubbles and adjust the headspace, if necessary. Add 1 Tbs. olive oil to each jar. Wipe the rims clean and seal tightly with the lids.

Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes. Let the jars stand undisturbed for 24 hours and then set them aside for 2 weeks to allow the flavors to develop. The sealed jars can be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year. If a seal has failed, store the jar in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Makes 6 one-pint jars.

Adapted from *The Art of Preserving*, by Lisa Atwood, Rebecca Courchesne & Rick Field (Weldon Owen, 2010).

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Ingredients for Giardiniera

4 small zucchini, about ¾ lb. total, cut into rounds ¼ inch thick

10 to 12 celery stalks, cut on the diagonal into 1-inch pieces

2 Tbs. kosher salt

6 ice cubes

3 cups white wine vinegar (6% acidity)

4 red bell peppers, about 1½ lb. total, halved and seeded

3 or 4 carrots, peeled

6 fresh oregano sprigs

18 garlic cloves

6 bay leaves

1 Tbs. peppercorns

1 small head cauliflower, cut into small florets

6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

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Freezing Instead of Canning

For many of us, the art of home canning is intimidating, and today's freezers offer an alternative. Deep freezers are able to maintain low temperatures and insulate food well enough to store produce when prepared correctly. These tips will help you freeze summer produce successfully:

- Wash fresh produce well and blot with paper towels to remove excess water before freezing; otherwise, the water will form ice crystals on the surface of the produce.
- Before freezing stone fruits, such as apricots, peaches and plums, remove the pit and cut the fruit in half or into quarters.
- Vegetables may be blanched before freezing. Some vegetables with a higher water content, such as summer squashes, freeze better when prepared in recipes first.
- If you are removing the skin or peel, do so before freezing.
- Remove all the air out of the freezer bag. For optimum results, utilize a vacuum system to seal the freezer bags and remove all the air.
- When freezing liquids, such as jams, tomato sauces and fruit purees, first freeze the liquid in a container or freezer bag, then remove when solid and vacuum seal to keep out air that can cause freezer damage.
- Always freeze in quantities that you will be using at one time to avoid having to defrost too much food at once.

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Technique Class: Saving Summer

Can't resist that flat of fresh berries? Wondering what to make with a bumper crop of tomatoes? Preserving the bounty of summer produce has been a necessity for hundreds of years. While today we no longer need to preserve summer produce, it has become a satisfying way to enjoy the delicious taste of the season for months to come. There is no comparison to produce at its peak of flavor!

The Basics of Fruit Spreads

Making fruit spreads—jams, jellies, preserves, conserves and marmalades—allows the home cook to capture the flavor of a favorite fruit in a jar. In addition to being one of the most popular home-canned items, fruit spreads can be frozen to enjoy for months after summer has ended. You need only a handful of ingredients: a sweetener, an acid and, of course, first-rate fruit at the peak of its season.

The best fruit spreads call for balancing just a few basic ingredients. Here are some guidelines and the key elements needed for making fruit spreads at home.

Fruit: Fruit spreads are only as good as the fruit you use to make them, so always seek out the most flavorful specimens. Unless you have fruit trees in your yard, farmers' markets are usually the best source. Pass up overripe fruits. Underripe fruits contain more pectin and acid, which you need for making fruit spreads, but they can also be less flavorful. For the best balance of flavor and consistency, combine slightly underripe and just-ripe fruits.

Pectin: Pectin is a natural carbohydrate that is concentrated in the skin and seeds of fruit. When combined with the proper ratio of sugar and acid, it causes liquids to jell. Adding pectin shortens the cooking time, ensuring a fresher fruit flavor. However, even low- or no-sugar pectin needs considerable sugar to jell the spread.

Sweeteners: All fruits contain sugar, but extra sugar is needed in preserves to activate the natural pectin in the fruit or the added pectin. Refined white (granulated) sugar is the most common sweetener for fruit preserves because it imparts little flavor and thus won't overpower the fruit's taste. Don't substitute honey, maple or other syrups or artificial sweeteners for the sugar in these recipes because their flavors are too strong.

Acid: A balance of acid and sugar in fruit spreads ensures not only a good set but also a pleasing flavor. Lemon juice works well in most recipes. As a rule, ¼ cup lemon juice per 1 lb. fruit is a good ratio, but taste your jam or other preserve to see if it needs more.

Ingredients for Mixed Berry Jam

4 cups raspberries

4 cups blackberries

4 cups blueberries

3 cups sugar

3⁄4 cup fresh lemon juice

Mixed Berry Jam

You can experiment with the ratio of berries in this recipe and, if you like, substitute 2 cups hulled and halved strawberries for 2 cups of the raspberries. The blackberries and blueberries give the jam lots of body as well as an intense berry flavor.

Have ready 6 hot, sterilized half-pint jars and their lids if you are canning. Or, use freezer jam jars to store in the freezer.

In a large nonreactive saucepan, gently stir together the berries, sugar and lemon juice. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce the heat to medium and cook, uncovered, stirring frequently, until the jam has thickened, about 15 minutes. It will continue to thicken as it cools.

Ladle the hot jam into the jars, leaving 1⁄4 inch of headspace. Remove any air bubbles and adjust the headspace, if necessary. Wipe the rims clean and seal tightly with the lids. If freezing instead of canning, let the jam cool to room temperature; ladle it into freezer jars, cover and freeze (do not process in a boiling-water bath).

If canning, process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes. The sealed jars can be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year. If a sealed has failed, store the jar in the refrigerator for up to 1 month. Makes 6 half-pint jars.

Adapted from *The Art of Preserving*, by Lisa Atwood, Rebecca Courchesne & Rick Field (Weldon Owen, 2010).

Scarlet Pepper Jelly

One of the earliest and most influential pepper jelly recipes appeared in the landmark 1950 Charleston Receipts, published by the city’s Junior League. Mrs. Johnson Hagood’s version in the book featured red bell peppers. This recipe combines bell peppers and jalapeños, preferably red ones for a scarlet sheen. Mrs. Hagood served her preserve over cream cheese, still a popular approach, but it also makes a great glaze for pork chops or tenderloin, and adds zest to a peanut butter sandwich.

Prepare 7 half-pint canning jars according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

In a large saucepan over high heat, combine the bell peppers, jalapeños, sugar, vinegar and lemon juice and bring to a boil. Boil until the pepper mixture is tender, about 15 minutes. If it threatens to overflow, reduce the heat. Pour the mixture into a food mill or through a coarse sieve and press the liquid through. Discard solids.

Rinse the pan, return the liquid to it, add the butter and bring the liquid back to a rolling boil over high heat. Pour in the pectin, stir well and continue boiling for 1 minute according to the pectin manufacturer’s instructions. Using a clean spoon, skim off any foam, though the butter should decrease the formation of foam. Pour the jelly into the prepared jars, leaving at least 1⁄4 inch of headspace.

Process the jars in a boiling-water bath according to the manufacturer’s instructions, generally about 10 minutes. The jelly may require several hours to set. Refrigerate the jars after opening. Makes 7 half-pint jars.

Adapted from *American Home Cooking*, by Cheryl Alters Jamison and Bill Jamison (Broadway Books, 1999).

Zucchini Muffins

The farmers’ market offers endless inspiration for creating muffins and quick breads that showcase plump blueberries, sweet-tart raspberries, juicy peaches and other peak-of-season produce. Savor the baked goods fresh from the oven, or freeze them to have on hand for easy breakfasts and snacks.

Preheat an oven to 400°F. Grease 10 standard muffin cups with butter or butter-flavored nonstick cooking spray; fill the unused cups one-third full with water to prevent warping.

In a bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cinnamon.

In another bowl, whisk together the eggs, oil, marmalade, vanilla and zucchini until blended. Add the flour mixture in three additions and beat just until evenly moistened and smooth. Stir in the raisins and nuts just until evenly distributed. The batter will be stiff.

Spoon the batter into the muffin cups, filling each no more than three-fourths full. Bake until the muffins are golden, dry and springy to the touch, and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 17 to 20 minutes. Transfer the pan to a wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Unmold the muffins. Serve them warm or at room temperature, with butter. Makes 10 muffins.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Collection Series, *Muffins*, by Beth Hensperger (Simon & Schuster, 2003).

Fresh Tomato Sauce

Use the freshest vine-ripened tomatoes you can find to prepare this simple sauce. Toss it with your favorite pasta or freeze it to enjoy later.

Place the tomatoes in a tomato press or food mill set over a bowl and pass them through the press or mill. Repeat as needed until all the large pieces of tomatoes are crushed. Set aside.

In a sauté pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 2 minutes. Add the oregano and stir to combine. Stir in the crushed tomatoes and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, uncovered, until the sauce is thickened, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in the basil and cook for 1 minute. Makes about 3 cups.

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Ingredients for Zucchini Muffins

1½ cups all-purpose flour

3⁄4 cup sugar

2 tsp. baking powder

1⁄4 tsp. baking soda

1⁄4 tsp. salt

1⁄2 tsp. ground cinnamon

2 eggs

1⁄3 cup canola oil or almond oil

1⁄4 cup orange marmalade

1 tsp. vanilla extract

1 zucchini, 4 oz. total, shredded and drained on paper towels

3⁄4 cup dark raisins or dried sweet cherries

1⁄4 cup pecans or almonds, chopped

Butter or cream cheese for serving

Ingredients for Fresh Tomato Sauce

2½ lb. ripe plum tomatoes

1⁄4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

5 garlic cloves, minced

1 Tbs. minced fresh oregano

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 Tbs. minced fresh basil