



THINK GREEN



EAT GREEN

**PRESERVE FOOD,
PRESERVE OUR ENVIRONMENT**

What is food preservation?

Preserving food means very simply preventing food from spoiling. Most preservation methods work by inhibiting or slowing bacterial growth, and keeping microorganisms (such as yeasts) from forming on food. Preservation also slows the oxidation of food that causes discoloration and rancidity.

Some History of Food Preservation



The oldest method of preserving food is drying, a process still used today. As early as 12,000 BC, cultures in the Middle East and Asia dried meat, fish, vegetables and fruit in the hot sun.

The modern canning process was invented by Nicolas Appert in France in 1809. He discovered that sealing food in a jar, heating the contents, and maintaining a high temperature for a period of time kept the food

safe to eat until the jar was pried open. Fifty years later, Louis Pasteur was able to explain the process: heating killed microorganisms in the food, and sealing the jar kept other microorganisms from entering.

Why is it important to preserve foods?

In terms of global distribution, the obvious answer is to provide food to areas where local agriculture cannot adequately support the population. An equally important *environmental* factor is that preserving allows us to capture food at peak ripeness and (in theory) preserve **all of it**, thus greatly eliminating waste. And we know that food waste in our landfills contributes large amounts of the incredibly potent greenhouse gas **methane**.

With our current understanding of the human effect on our environment, most of us assert a desire to live and **eat sustainably**. One definition of sustainability is *to meet one's own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*; in other words, avoiding the depletion of natural resources while maintaining an ecological balance.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) maintains that food is at the heart of many environmental issues: Its production contributes 20% of the earth's total carbon emissions and causes 60% of global biodiversity loss. A large portion of each of these numbers can be attributed to meat and dairy production. On their [website](#) WWF addresses the importance of reconnecting people with food. Their **Plant2Plate** [program](#) comes to primary school classrooms in the UK, teaching young students how to plan a garden, then planting, harvesting and cooking their own produce. Another WWF [initiative](#) is **Eating for 2 Degrees** which urges changes to our current food system to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius as stipulated in the Paris Agreement.



How can preserving food help us as individuals to eat more sustainably?

Growing and preserving your own food is one of the most important aspects of sustainable living. Many of us have vegetable gardens with plentiful harvests at this time of year. If we're not gardeners, we certainly have access to abundant local produce at nearby markets and farms, many offering end-of-season bulk buying.



Why preserve your own food?

Here are a few reasons why “putting food by” is better for us and for the planet:

- Reduces food waste on farms and in our gardens.

[Remember - garden produce that is not consumed should be composted. Not a composter? The Havre de Grace Green Team's Food Waste Disposal bins at Hutchins Park will take your kitchen scraps!]

- Promotes healthier eating. Pantry or freezer shelves full of preserved whole foods might keep us from the temptation of unhealthy convenience foods.
- Economical way to feed your family (grow your own or buy bulk in season).
- You are eating food that has been “processed” only to the extent of hot-water canning or home freezing.
- Home-preserved foods have expended no transportation, packaging or advertising energy or costs. Home canning glass jars can be re-used indefinitely, while the freezing process can use re-purposed jars and plastic containers.

Lastly, the ultimate benefit of preserving food at home is the enjoyment of flavorful summer produce year-round, without buying fruits or vegetables that are “in season” halfway around the world.

<< A caveat for 2020: As home canners may already know, there has been a shortage of canning supplies in stores this year. Like many other challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, increased gardening and a slowdown of manufacturing has led to empty shelves where jars and lids normally sit. A request of friends and family to check their basements for unused equipment could produce the items you need! >>

How do we preserve foods?

Foodtank, The Think Tank for Food, is a non-profit organization supporting global food system issues. Their [website](#) introduces us to a variety of methods for preserving food, beyond the usual freezing and canning - techniques such as drying, fermenting, and infusing . And **The Ploughshare Institute** of Waco, Texas has a helpful [article](#) on food preservation and sustainability, including the technique of "natural storage" (think root vegetables, onions and garlic).



The internet has countless sources with information on safely preserving food. Best bets are university extension services or US Department of Agriculture (USDA) websites.

SOME GREEN THOUGHTS



"I think of my canning as fast food, paid for in time up front."

- *Barbara Kingsolver, author*

"The pop of a canning lid is a joyful noise."

- *a farmgirl thing*

"... I can think of no better form of personal involvement in the cure of the environment than that of gardening. A person who is growing a garden, if he is growing it organically, is improving a piece of the world...."

-Wendell Berry