

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Putting food by

Sometimes I wonder why I live in a modern time. I spent the weekend putting food by—canning, preserving and freezing summer favorites so that during the winter we can have blueberry topping on pancakes or pesto on pasta or preserved peaches on hot biscuits and still be eating locally. And for the very first time, I have made pickles—sweet pickles with the bite of both mustard seed and black peppercorns.

I have never eaten pickles that tasted or crunched like my Granny's. Thick-cut slices of Kirby cucumbers in syrup accented by mustard seed and whole black peppercorns for a hot-sweet zip with that incredible crunch. They were so very crunchy, that I suspect Granny soaked her cucumbers in lime, but I'll never know.

Granny never put up fruits and veggies when we were around and apparently, since I have searched all her cookbooks and handwritten recipes, she never wrote down any of her specialties—not her preserved slices of peach or pear, or her sweet chunks of watermelon rind, not even those memorable pickles. Such a monumental loss.

I started putting food by as a high school junior when I made apple butter for an American History project. All through my life I have made small batches of apple butter or jams as gifts. Recently, I have made a more organized effort to put food by—oil-packing roasted tomatoes, freezing pesto, canning jam, jellies and preserved fruits.

Sometimes I recreate a taste memory while making sure we can enjoy the flavors of summer next winter. I don't know about the pickles, they're not ready yet, but I'm very proud of these peaches—they are just like Granny's, so I wrote the recipe down!

Granny's Preserved Peaches

INGREDIENTS

12-16 ripe, firm peaches
3 cups granulated sugar
1 lemon, juiced

DIRECTIONS

Peel peaches by submersing them in boiled water for one minute (try using a colander for easy removal), cool and peel with your hands by sliding the skin off—trust me, it works!

Slice peaches into thin crescents from top to bottom—like longitude markings on a globe. Each peach will yield at least 12-18 slices.

Layer peach slices with sugar in a large deep pot. Sprinkle lemon juice over all and stir lightly. Place pot over medium-high heat to melt sugar and release juices, occasionally stirring very gently so the peach slices don't break up.

Once all the sugar has melted and the juice is bubbling, reduce heat to low and stir approximately every half hour. They are done when the juice has thickened to syrup and the peaches are darker and somewhat translucent—it takes at least 3 hours.

Ladle into hot jars and process 10-12 minutes. Store in a cool dark place.



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What's Fresh Right Now?

Basil—italian, thai, lemon, spicy bush
Beans—green, long, winged, shelled butter/lima
Blueberries
Bok Choy/Pak Choi—green, baby
Carrots
Corn—yellow, white, silver queen
Cucumbers—mini seedless, slicers, Kirby
Eggplant—white/purple italian and asian
Garlic—elephant, chives
Herbs—basil, marjoram, lime leaf, parsley, chives, rosemary, lemongrass, tar-agon, thyme, spearmint
Honey
Kale
Lettuce—spring mix
Melons—red/yellow/orange watermelon, cantaloupe, crenshaw
Onions—yellow, sweet, scallions
Peas—white acre, zipper cream
Peppers—green/red sweet bell, jalapeno, habanero, chocolate habanero, sweet banana, scotch bonnet, poblano
Potatoes—sweet, red, white
Radish—microgreens
Shoots—pea, corn, sunflower
Spinach—asian
Squash—summer, zucchini, round zucchini, bi-color summer, white pattypan, spaghetti, acorn, butternut, delicata, marrow, crookneck
Sprouts—sunflower, mung, lentil, alfalfa
Sweet Potatoes
Tomatoes—beefsteak, grape, cluster, green, heirloom, cherry, sungold
Take a look around your farmers market for fresh herbs. Now is prime time, especially for basil. Put some by—buy a big bagful and make a batch of pesto to put in the freezer. Dry your own herbs for a fresher flavor than expensive store-bought jars.

Local and Fresh—

Fuzzy Melon

The outside has fuzzy hairs, the inside looks like a seedless zucchini, and it's not a melon—it's a member of the gourd family! Yes, that's the fuzzy melon, also know as mo gwa or mo qua in Chinese cooking.

Unique for its ability to keep its shape after cooking, fuzzy melon will take on the flavors of any recipe and is great in spicy dishes.

Other than peeling before eating, this veggie can be used interchangeably with zucchini. Used raw, as in the Sesame Slaw, it keeps its crunch even with dressing. Cooked with mixed veggies, it will keep its shape and add a little texture even if stewed or baked.

Sesame Slaw with Thai Basil Flowers

INGREDIENTS

4 cups shredded fuzzy melon
1 cup shredded carrot
1/2 cup chopped green onion
2 Tablespoons olive oil
2 Tablespoons rice wine vinegar
2 Tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
1 Tablespoon toasted sesame oil
2 Tablespoons sesame seeds (black and white)
1 teaspoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 Tablespoons fresh lime juice
several stalks of basil flowers

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, stir the veggies together until combined. Mix in remaining ingredients, *except* salt, lime juice and flowers. Refrigerate covered for at least one hour or overnight.

Before serving, stir in salt and lime juice. Remove flowers from stalks and stir into slaw. Scatter a few flowers over the top for presentation. Great for potlucks!

Save the World—One Dinner at a Time!

Summer Vegetable Bake

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon olive oil	1 teaspoon butter
3 large ears fresh corn, cut off cob, raw	4 cups mixed summer veggies, chopped
4 green onions, chopped	1 clove garlic, smashed and chopped
1 cup roasted tomatoes, chopped	1/2 cup dry vermouth or veggie broth
1/2 cup chopped herbs, divided (parsley or basil)	1 large tomato, thinly sliced
2 Tablespoons butter, melted	2 eggs, boiled, peeled and mashed
1 cup parmesan cheese, grated	freshly ground black pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a large heavy ovenproof skillet, heat the olive oil and butter over medium-high heat. Stir in corn and sauté for 3 minutes. Add veggies to pan and cook another two minutes. Mix in green onions, garlic, roasted tomatoes, liquid and half the herbs. Stir well and remove from heat. May be made ahead to this point, covered and refrigerated.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix together melted butter, mashed egg and remaining herbs. Top veggies with sliced tomatoes, sprinkle with egg-herb mixture and parmesan cheese. Bake 20-30 minutes, until completely heated through. Season with pepper to taste before serving.

NOTE: Mixed summer veggies includes all kinds of squash—yellow summer squash, zucchini, pattypan—fuzzy melon, peppers, carrots, even okra and eggplant. Experiment!

Vegan Black Bean and Corn Enchiladas

INGREDIENTS

1 Tablespoon olive oil	1/2 small onion, diced
3 large ears fresh corn, cut off cob, raw	2 cups cooked black beans
1/2 cup fresh herbs, chopped (basil or cilantro)	1 Tablespoon white balsamic vinegar
1 lime, juiced	salt to taste
2 cups green enchilada sauce or green salsa	12 white corn tortillas

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare a large baking dish by wiping lightly with oil.

In a large heavy skillet, heat oil and sauté onion over medium heat until softened. Stir in corn and sauté about 5 minutes until corn is sweet and softened. Add black beans and herbs, stir well and cook an additional 5 minutes. Season bean-corn mixture with vinegar and lime juice. Add salt to taste.

Pour 1/2 cup of green sauce in bottom of prepared baking dish. Roll up tortillas with 1/3 cup of bean mixture in each and place seam-side down on sauce. When all tortillas are filled and placed in dish, pour the remaining green sauce over all, cover pan with foil and bake 30 minutes, until bubbly. Serve immediately. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Tricks and Tips

To cut corn off the cob, stand the ear of corn on the center of a bundt pan or in a deep bowl. Use a sharp knife to cut from top to bottom at the base of the kernels.

Run the knife over the cob a second time to get any remaining kernels and if you want the “milk” to make creamed corn.

Roasted Corn

Most people buy fresh corn with just one recipe in mind—boiled corn on the cob. Try roasting corn in a grill or oven for a sweet and smoky treat. Pull back the husks without removing them, strip off all the silk, then replace the husks. Opinions differ, but I soak the husk-covered corn in water for 30 minutes before roasting. Place corn in a 375 degree oven or on a grill rack. Corn is done when kernels pierce easily—about 30 minutes.



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Tricks and Tips

I am often asked about the use of butter in baking recipes—I will not use margarine or butter substitutes! Recipes can be made with less fat by substituting applesauce for a portion of the butter—taste and texture are altered.

I could quote my mother “Everything in moderation” but the reality is if you cut a 9x9 pan of bars into 16 squares each has only 1 1/2 teaspoons of butter—definitely worth it—Julia Child would agree!

Maple Oat Breakfast Bars with Walnuts

These aren't crispy like granola bars, but as chewy and substantial as a thick bowl of oatmeal. They might have a bit too much sugar to be an everyday breakfast item, but they pack great for camping or backpacking trips, and, with a glass of milk or a cup of yogurt, these breakfast bars are perfect for a breakfast on the go.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 1/4 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
3 cups rolled oats

1/2 cup pure maple syrup
2 eggs
1/2 teaspoon maple extract
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup chopped walnuts

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9x9 or equivalent size baking pan.
Melt butter and mix in maple syrup. Add sugar and stir until dissolved before beating in the eggs one at a time. Stir in extracts and set aside.
Mix together flour, soda, baking powder and salt. Add to butter mixture and stir lightly until mostly mixed together. Add rolled oats and walnuts and stir until completely combined.
Smooth into the prepared pan by pressing lightly with your hand—run cold water over your hand to prevent sticking. Make sure dough is distributed evenly.
Bake for 20-30 minutes—center will spring back when bars are baked.
Cool before cutting. Store in an airtight container at room temperature. To freeze, wrap in foil and place in zip top freezer bags.