

Daily Union Article

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Title: Preserve It Fresh!

Apple picking season in Kansas ranges from mid-August through October. I remember when I was a child that my parents would sometimes load us up in the car on an early Saturday morning to make a trek to one of the many area apple orchards. Sometimes we would stay close, while other times, we would head to the locally owned orchards along the Kansas-Missouri state line. Loaded down with buckets and paper bags, we would strike out to collect our bounty (and pay for it, of course!). Upon return, we would stare at the load and wonder "What now?"

As we near the last quarter of the apple picking season here in Kansas and you are perhaps faced with your own bounty, I thought it might be a great time to share some information about preserving apples so that you can enjoy them year around! Karen Blakeslee, Extension Associate of Food Science recently published a fact sheet on this topic. *Preserve It Fresh, Preserve It Safe: Apples* (MF1187) offers the following food safety approaches for preserving fresh fruits.

When preserving fresh foods at home, follow proper procedures to prevent foodborne illness. These safety tested methods can be used to freeze and can apples.

Freezing

Freezer manuals offer guidelines for the maximum amount that can be frozen at one time to maintain quality — usually 2 to 3 pounds of food for each cubic foot of freezer space. Syrup pack is preferred for apples to be used for uncooked desserts or fruit cocktail. A sugar or dry pack is good for pie making. Select full-flavored apples that are crisp and firm, not mealy in texture. Wash, peel, and core. Slice the medium apples into twelfths, the large ones into sixteenths.

For a syrup pack: Use a chilled 40 percent syrup. Dissolve 2¾ cups of sugar in 4 cups of lukewarm water, mixing until the solution is clear. Chill.

To prevent browning, add ½ teaspoon (1500 mg) of ascorbic acid to each quart of syrup. Slice the apples into the syrup in a container starting with ½ cup of syrup for each pint of apples. Fill pint- or quart-size freezer bags to a level of 3 to 4 inches from the tops, add the syrup if needed to cover the apples, squeeze out the air, seal, and label.

For a sugar pack: To prevent darkening, dissolve ½ teaspoon (1500 mg) of ascorbic acid in 3 tablespoons of water. Sprinkle over the fruit. Mix ½ cup of sugar with 1 quart (1¼ lbs.) of fruit. Fill freezer bags to a level of 3 to 4 inches from the tops, squeeze out the air, seal, and label.

For a dry/tray pack: Follow the directions for a sugar pack, omitting the sugar. Treated apple slices can also be frozen first on a tray and then packed into containers as soon as they are frozen.

Canning

Wash, sterilize, and keep jars hot. For standard metal lids, preheating is optional. If desired, heat in simmering but not boiling, water. If using reusable plastic lids with rubber rings, follow the manufacturer's instructions.

To learn more about canning, see *How-to Guide to Water Bath Canning and Steam Canning* (MF3241) and *How-to Guide to Pressure Canning* (MF3242).

When my family would return from the orchard, we would sort through the apples to determine which ones needed to be used or preserved first. The apples that had blemishes or appeared bruised would go into the batch for immediate use – eaten fresh or preserved as apple butter. In the Preserve it Fresh fact sheet, a tasty recipe for Apple Butter (along with apple jelly and apple pie fillings) is offered:

Apple Butter

Use Jonathan, Winesap, Stayman, Golden Delicious, MacIntosh, or other cooking varieties. This recipe may be canned in half-pint, pint or quart jars.

Yield: About 8 to 9 pints

8 pounds apples

2 cups apple cider

2 cups cider vinegar (5%)

2 ¼ cups white sugar

2 ¼ cups packed brown sugar

2 tablespoons ground cinnamon

1 tablespoon ground cloves

Wash, remove stems, quarter, and core fruit. Cook slowly in cider and vinegar until soft. Press the fruit through a colander, food mill, or strainer. Cook fruit pulp with sugar and spices, stirring frequently. To test for doneness, remove a spoonful and hold it away from the steam for 2 minutes. It is done if the butter remains mounded on the spoon. Another way to determine when the butter is cooked adequately is to spoon a small quantity onto a plate. When a rim of liquid does not separate around the edge of the butter, it is ready for canning.

Fill hot half-pint, pint, or quart jars with hot product, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe jar rims. Apply lids and rings fingertip-tight. Process in a boiling water canner or steam canner according to Table 2. Turn off heat and remove canner lid. Let jars cool 5 minutes. Remove jars from canner; do not retighten bands. Cool completely, check seals, label, and store.

Preserving it fresh is a great way to enjoy local produce throughout the year. In addition to the great flavors that are captured, the aroma that comes from cooked apples embodies the spirit of fall throughout the house! For more information of food preservation techniques and safety-tested recipes or to get your free copy of the Preserve It Fresh Apples fact sheet, contact me at the Geary County Extension office 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!