

# Storing and Preserving Your Harvest

Having your own produce inevitably means that you end up with a glut of produce during the summer months. Even when the summer has been as disappointing as this one there is bound to be an excess in some of the produce which means we need to think of ways of storing them and using them over the winter months when the supply of fruits and vegetables is less varied.

## Methods of Storing

Many vegetables and fruits can be stored successfully for winter use.

Onions and garlic can be dried off by lying out in the sun after harvesting them and after a few weeks can be strung up and stored in a frost free shed where they will be fine until the spring.

Potatoes can be stored in hessian sacks or paper sacks. They need to be in a sack that breathes to prevent moisture causing the spread of any infection. Again storage must be in a frost free situation.

Apples and pears are best stowed in wooden trays which you can stack one on top of another. These can be obtained from your local supermarket. Line the box with paper and set out the apples stalk downwards and not touching. Put pears lying on their sides. Green tomatoes will go red if stored similarly in trays. Inspect regularly for spoilage.

Many people used to store their vegetables in a 'clamp' or long mound in the open covered with straw and soil but this attracts mice and rats. It is easier to monitor for animal spoilage in a frost free shed.

Pumpkins and squashes can be stored in the nylon nets which supermarkets use for veggies. Then these can be hung from nails in the roof.

All stored fruit and vegetables must be regularly inspected for any signs of spoilage. Rotting fruit or vegetables need to be removed to prevent the spread of disease to otherwise perfect fruit and vegetables.

Carrots, parsnips and beetroot can be left in the ground until late autumn. They can be spoiled by a hardy winter so best to dig them up in October and dry before storing in boxes in dry peat or dry sand.

## Methods of Preserving

There are a variety of ways of preserving the harvest and these include:-

**Drying** An ancient method where the fruit or vegetables are laid out in the sun to dry. Drying using a low oven can substitute. They can then be stored and then rehydrated for use. Herbs are best dried by hanging upside down in bunches in the hot press and once dry crumbled and stored in the dark in jars.

**Salting** Involves leaving the veggies covered in salt until the water has been removed. I have done this with runner beans! To use one must soak in several changes of water to remove the salt. I must add that the runner beans were pretty tasteless once the salt had been removed!

**Bottling** Usually require partial cooking, as in tomato sauce, then bottling and heat sealing. The sealed jars are then submerged and boiled for 20 minutes or so, until a vacuum is formed.

**Freezing** This is the more modern method of preserving fruits, vegetables and herbs that have been grown over the summer. Vegetables need to be blanched first in boiling water and then plunged into ice cold water. This helps to preserve colour and flavour. Once dry they can then be packed into airtight containers and stored in the freezer for winter use. Fruits can usually be frozen whole or rolled in sugar and then frozen. Vegetable and fruit coulis can be made which take up less room in the freezer and are great additions to soups and sauces or in the case of fruits to ice cream or to flavour yoghurts. Pestos can be made from herbs which again can be used for soups or for pasta. Soups can be made and frozen ready for use in the winter. Veggies and fruits with high water content do not freeze whole so well but made into coulis are perfect. Examples of these include strawberries, tomatoes, and courgettes.

**Preserves** This is another popular way of preserving fruits and vegetables. This is a method of preserving using sugar or vinegar which prevents micro-organisms from surviving. With sugar, jams and jellies are a popular way of conserving the fruit. With vinegar, the veggies are either preserved in spiced vinegar or the vinegar is used along with sugar and spices to make chutneys and relishes.

The following is a variety of recipes along with tasters for you to try to show what you could do with some of your excess produce to make some very tasty preserves.

**Tomatoes.** If you are growing tomatoes or even if you buy some when there is a glut it's great to make a tomato sauce ready for use in sauces and soups. Simply place 400g tomatoes in the bowl of a food processor and whizz to a puree. Pack into airtight containers and freeze. You can add a pinch of salt and sugar to them if so desired.

I find cherry tomatoes so easy to freeze whole and they soon cook down to a sauce. Brilliant when stuck for time. The following is a delicious recipe for tomato chutney and this could even be made with tinned tomatoes.

## **Kamal's Sweet Tomato Chutney**

900g ripe tomatoes  
¼ tsp whole fennel seeds  
¼ tsp whole fenugreek seeds  
½ Litre white wine vinegar  
395g sugar  
10 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped  
½ tsp powdered ginger  
2 bay leaves  
¼ tsp ground mace  
¼ tsp garam masala  
¼ tsp cayenne pepper  
1 1/4 tsp salt  
30g raisins

Grind the fennel and fenugreek seeds in a coffee grinder or pestle and mortar

Chop the tomatoes and place in a large heavy steel saucepan and add all the other ingredients except the raisins. Bring to the boil and stir well until the sugar is all dissolved. Boil rapidly and cook for around 40 mins stirring every now and then.

Add the raisins to the chutney and stir more frequently to avoid the chutney from sticking to the bottom of the saucepan. After 20 to 25 mins it should be ready and will be enough to fill 16fl oz. Fill jars and allow to cool completely before covering and storing in a cool place or in the fridge. It keeps for months.

This chutney is lovely with cold meats, cheese, on toast or with Indian meals.

## **Home-dried tomatoes**

Try making your own sundried tomatoes. Slice cherry tomatoes in half, season and drizzle with olive oil and a scattering of fresh thyme. Dry for 30 mins in a cool oven 140 deg C/Gas Mark 1. Transfer the cooled tomatoes to cold sterilised jars and cover completely with olive oil. Delicious sprinkled over the top of a pizza.

Plum tomatoes can be cut in half and similarly drizzled with olive oil and sliced fresh basil. Dry in the cool oven for 45-55mins and then cool and pack as before. Once the jar is opened keep it stored in the fridge.

## **Courgette, potato & cheddar soup**

Here is an easy quick soup and a new idea I recently came about to deal with the inevitable glut of courgettes!

500g potatoes , unpeeled and roughly chopped  
2 vegetable stock cubes  
1kg courgettes , roughly chopped  
bunch spring onion , sliced - save 1 for serving, if eating straight away(can substitute with a small onion and some chives)  
100g extra-mature cheddar or vegetarian alternative, grated, plus a little extra to serve  
good grating fresh nutmeg , plus extra to serve

Put the potatoes in a large pan with just enough water to cover them and crumble in the stock cubes. Bring to the boil, then cover and cook for 5 mins. Add the courgettes, put the lid back on and cook for 5 mins more. Throw in the spring onions, cover and cook for a final 5 mins.

Take off the heat, stir in the cheese and season with the nutmeg, salt and pepper. Whizz to a thick soup, adding more hot water until you get the consistency you like. Serve scattered with extra grated cheddar, spring onions and nutmeg or pepper. Or cool and freeze in freezer bags or containers with good lids for up to 3 months.

## **Apple Butter**

This is a deliciously, slow-cooked spiced apple spread delicious on hot buttered toast. It's very popular in North America, where there are whole towns that organise whole festivals around it.

1.25 Kg cooking apples such as Bramleys  
300ml water or apple juice  
100g light brown soft sugar  
200g granulated sugar  
1 tablesp ground cinnamon  
½ tsp ground cloves  
¼ tsp ground allspice

Peel, quarter and core the apples. Put into a heavy bottomed saucepan with the water and bring to the boil. Simmer until the apples are soft, 30 – 40 mins.

Blend in a food processor and pour the puree into a roasting pan. Stir in the rest of the ingredients.

Bake, uncovered, stirring occasionally for 30-40 mins, until the mixture is thick enough to pile onto a plate. Allow to cool slightly before spooning into hot sterilised jars. When cool label and store.

## Mint Jelly

The classic jelly to accompany roast lamb. This ensures you have a supply of a mint sauce all winter.

1.5Kg cooking apples  
Juice of 3 lemons  
50g fresh mint  
A few drops of green food colouring (optional)  
Caster sugar (see recipe for quantity)

Roughly chop up the apples. Finely chop half the mint. Place in a heavy bottomed saucepan with the juice of the lemons and simmer for 20-30mins.

Spoon the contents of the saucepan into a jelly bag suspended over a bowl. Allow to drip through the bag overnight. Next day measure the liquid and return to the saucepan along with 450g caster sugar for every 600 ml of liquid. Stir well over a low heat to dissolve the sugar.

Increase the heat and boil rapidly for 10-15 mins before testing for a set.

Once it has reached setting point turn off the heat. Skim off any scum on the top and allow to cool slightly before adding the remaining mint, finely chopped and 2 or 3 drops of green food colouring, if using.

Pour into hot, sterilised jars. Seal and label and store once cool.

## Walnut Pesto

A different type of pesto from the classic basil pesto, not so much basil is required. This is delicious with pasta or stirred into soups. Try adding a little cream for an extra special pasta sauce.

3 tablesp chopped fresh basil  
3 tablesp chopped fresh parsley  
25g wild rocket leaves  
2 cloves garlic chopped  
75g walnuts  
20g grated parmesan  
150ml extra virgin olive oil  
Salt and pepper

Put all ingredients into the bowl of a food processor with a little oil and blitz to chop coarsely. Grate in the cheese. Blitz again adding the rest of the oil. Once a fine paste is achieved pour into containers. These can be stored in the fridge for up to 2 weeks or freeze.

It's possible to make endless vegetable or fruit coulis (purees) which can be used immediately or stored for future use in the freezer. In their pureed form they take up less room in the freezer and can help out when there is a glut of that particular fruit or vegetable.

Fruit coulis can be used in many ways and are delicious drizzled over cheesecakes, stirred into poached fruits, drizzled over ice-cream or mixed in natural yoghurt.

## Fruit Coulis

300g soft summer fruits ie strawberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants, gooseberries etc.  
1 tablesp lemon juice  
Icing sugar to taste  
(add fruit liqueur if desired)

Place all in the bowl of a food processor and blitz. Pack in airtight containers, label and freeze.

## Vegetable Coulis

This is a basic recipe for a vegetable puree. These can then be frozen and then used as a basis for sauces for fish, vegetarian and meat recipes or stirred into soups or used as a basis for cream soups.

450g vegetables  
¼ cup onion  
1 tablesp olive oil.  
Vegetable stock  
Splash of white wine  
Salt and black pepper

Sweat the chopped vegetables and onion in olive oil for 5-10 minutes,

Add stock to just cover the vegetables and simmer until just tender. Blitz in the food processor add seasoning. Pack in airtight containers label and store.

Combinations of veggies, herbs and spices can be made. Try carrots with ginger or orange juice, cauliflower with roast red pepper, parsnip with apple.

### **Gazpacho coulis**

An example of a vegetable coulis using a mixture of different vegetables and flavours. This coulis is delicious with seafood dishes.

1 tomato  
½ teasp tomato paste  
1 cucumber (peeled and deseeded)  
Juice of 1 red pepper  
1 clove garlic  
1 celery stalk  
Olive oil, salt and pepper

Process all the vegetables in the bowl of a food processor.  
Add a tablespoon or two of olive oil to achieve a pouring consistency  
Adjust seasoning to taste.  
Can be stored and frozen as for vegetable coulis.

### **Beetroot cake with blackcurrant cream**

250g beetroot, raw, peeled and grated  
250ml sunflower oil  
225g caster sugar  
3 eggs  
225g self-raising flour  
A pinch of salt  
For the filling  
125g butter, at room temperature  
250g icing sugar  
200g cream cheese (I used Philadelphia Light)  
100g blackcurrants

Pre-heat an oven to 170 degrees/gas 3. Grease two 18-centimetre sandwich tins and line the bases with greaseproof paper.

Whisk the oil and sugar together to combine, and then add the eggs, one at a time. Sieve the flour and salt over the mixture, and then fold in gently using a large metal spoon. Tip in the beetroot and fold into the mixture.

Divide the mix between two cake tins and bake for 30-40 minutes, or until cooked, you can check this by inserting a skewer into the centre – or a piece of raw spaghetti will do the trick also – if it comes out clean then your cake is baked.

Take the cakes out of the oven and allow to cool in the tins for 10 minutes or so before turning out on to a wire rack.

To make the icing, beat the butter and icing sugar together until light and fluffy, this will take five minutes or so using an electric mixer. Add the cream cheese and blackcurrants and continue beating until the mixture comes together. Pop the blackcurrant cream into the fridge for an hour or so while the cake is cooling down. If it becomes too stiff, beat for a minute or two to loosen up.

When the cake is cold, spread one-third of the icing over one cake and sandwich together with the other cake, and then spread the remaining icing on top. Decorate with some pretty marigold petals