

Controlled Atmosphere Storage Extends Peach and Tomato Life

Controlled atmospheres extend storage life of peaches, nectarines, and mature-green tomatoes without increasing decay or producing off-flavors, a U S Department of Agriculture scientist said recently.

Speaking before the 13th International Congress of Refrigeration, Dr. Raymond E Anderson, horticulturist of USDA's Agricultural Research Service at Beltsville, Md., described results from controlled-atmosphere tests conducted at Beltsville.

Peaches and nectarines were stored in atmospheres with oxygen levels of 1/4, 1, 3, and 21 per cent, in combination with carbon dioxide levels of zero and 5 percent. Storage time was 3, 6, and 9 weeks at 32° F, and in one test, 40° F.

The best atmosphere tested was 1 per cent oxygen with 5 per cent carbon dioxide (the remaining 94 per cent being essentially nitrogen). Most varieties stored in this atmosphere, then removed to air at 65° F, ripened with better flesh color and flavor and were softer and juicier than fruit stored in air.

Decay, while not prevented, was usually less in this atmosphere. Pennsylvania and Florida-grown mature-green tomatoes were screened for defects and red color, then randomly distributed into lots. Samples from lots were placed in storage atmospheres of 3 per cent and 21 per cent oxygen, each with and without 5 per cent carbon dioxide, and held at 55° F for 3, 6, and 9 weeks.

An atmosphere of 3 per cent oxygen with 97 per cent nitrogen was judged the best of the atmospheres tested. Tomatoes held in this atmosphere remained firm and predominantly green up to 6 weeks in storage and ripened satisfactorily with acceptable flavor after removal to air at 65° F. Decay was 25 per cent 2 weeks after ripening following 6 weeks storage, compared to 96 per cent for air-stored tomatoes.

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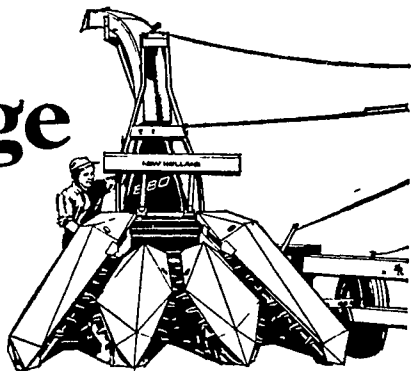
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One point emphasized in the course is that you decide first whether it would be better to can or to freeze a product. Some produce turns out better when canned, and tomatoes fall in this class. But it's usually better to freeze strong-flavored vegetables, such as cauliflower and broccoli.

If canning produce, you must know and use the method which gives you the best results. Processing in the pressure cooker is recommended for all meats and non-acid vegetables such as corn and green beans. The boiling water bath is preferable for processing fruits and tomatoes.

Besides guiding you in correct methods, the "Canning and Food Preservation" course has sweet and sour pickle recipes, suggestions to guarantee tender, clear jelly, and a summary of the family's daily food needs.

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