

August Is A Month For Harvesting And Preserving Garden Bounty

BY SALLY BAIR

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LANCASTER — August is the month when many homemakers turn serious thoughts to processing and preserving the harvests of their gardens and orchards for enjoyment in the upcoming winter months. For Esther Sangrey, however, thoughts of preserving are with her even before she plants her garden.

Growing and preserving fruits and vegetables is almost second nature for Esther, who remembers playing house as a small girl and making sure her "houses" had shelves to hold her jars of canned goods. This was a natural reaction to watching and helping her mother can on their Conestoga Center farm.

The wife of E. Elvin Sangrey, Esther now lives in rural Pequea Township and plants a large garden on their half-acre lot. It was after her marriage that she began canning in earnest for her family, which eventually included two daughters.

About 10 years ago, Esther added a new dimension to her canning by deciding to take her finished products to local fairs for competition. She said she had always enjoyed going to the fairs and looking at the canned goods, often thinking to herself that she had things of equal quality at home.

Time has proven her right, as she continues to collect dozens of ribbons at each of the four fairs at which she exhibits: Lampeter, New Holland, Solanco and Manheim. Now, entering in the

competition has become a tradition, although Esther says with a laugh, "Each year I say this is the last year I will enter."

That thought surfaces when she is gathering her vegetables, baked goods and canned food to take to the fair. Esther says, "It's the baked goods that foul me up in the end." She adds, "My car is full when I go." She likes to take cakes, pies and cookies, and chooses at least 25 different varieties of canned goods, including fruits, vegetables and relishes. An additional 10 jars go along to be used in the "display" category.

Esther says, "As the season goes on, the fair is in the back of my mind." It starts with planting, when she chooses her favorite varieties, and continues as she harvests them. She says the abundance of moisture has been great for the crops, but still thinks she may not have a lot of fresh vegetables to show because so many are maturing ahead of schedule. The corn which she planted especially for the fair season will be over long before the first fair opens.

In the canning process, Esther admits that these products which are headed for the fair receive special attention. Only the best and the most uniform are selected, and she picks her produce early in the morning. "I like to get right at it," she remarks. Nevertheless, she often finds herself canning late at night, just to get all the work done. The actual preparation is done largely in her basement kitchen, although sometimes both kitchens are pressed into use.



Although most of her fair ribbons get stored in shoe boxes in the attic, Esther's husband, Elvin, made her this cardboard stand to display one year's earnings.

Esther adds, "I go directly to the orchard to pick my fruit. That way I know exactly what is in the basket." Her favorite peach varieties for canning are Red Haven and Glo Haven.

She enjoys the fun of the competition and notes, "Each year I do better at the fairs." She attributes her better showing to "learning what the judges are looking for." To help her remember over the years, Esther says, "I keep a notebook to see what I do. I am finding that I do better in canned vegetables."

She adds, "Lampeter is my best fair." In fact, she said she likes the Lampeter Fair because it is the "best old time fair." She has found that many people travel to several fairs as she does, and she has made friends from around the county.

With the large amount of food she displays, Esther often comes home with many, many ribbons which she stores carefully in shoe boxes in the attic. "When I retire, I am going to make them into a quilt," she says with a laugh.

Last year she received a special award for the "Outstanding Entry" at the Solanco Fair, a special surprise for her.

Esther continues to enjoy comparing her produce with other displays at the various fairs and expresses a mild interest in canning some of the more unusual items like spinach and red beet tops. However, she says, "I stick to things I'm going to use or give away." She said she often gives her prize-winning fruit as a hostess or Christmas gift.

In addition to the canning done for fairs, Esther prepares about 200 quarts of fruits for her family's use. Usually about 100 quarts of that will be peaches, something her husband is particularly fond of. She stores her canned goods in the cold cellar they built for that purpose. She said she usually freezes most of her vegetables, but says that when her daughters visit they leave with bags of vegetables.

Her days are not just filled with canning food, though it could be understandable to think so. At least three days a week she does cleaning for others, and in the last 10 years she has developed a business of cooking in other people's homes. She also serves as cook at the family church, Southern Lancaster Grace Brethren Church, where she and her husband serve as deacon and deaconess.

She says, "I like cooking, and I enjoy working in other people's kitchens, once you get the feel of it." She said she has learned to search for what she needs if it is not immediately evident. And although she usually uses recipes



Pickles are just one of many relishes Esther likes to prepare in addition to canning fruit. Here she prepares a batch of Crisp Banquet Pickles.

suggested by the hostess, she sometimes needs to make something on her own. For those times she says, "I always carry a pack of recipes in my handbag."

She likes trying new recipes and often meters to her own wide variety of cookbooks. She also likes to look at and use cookbooks where she is preparing meals. And she takes away any mystery about her ability as a cook by saying, "If you can read, you can cook."

Nevertheless, she has a special touch in the kitchen which has people requesting her skills. She says her venture into cooking for others began "by accident," but now she prepares anything from small wedding receptions to

dinners for small groups.

Another sideline for Esther is making wedding cakes. After taking a course in cake decorating from Willow Street Vo-Tech School, she began making cakes. Her first was for a family wedding, but her success has been so great that she now makes about three a month. She said April and May are becoming extremely busy months for weddings.

To help prospective customers choose which wedding cake is perfect for their special occasion, Esther keeps pictures of all the cakes she's ever made. All of her cakes are made from scratch, and she will make any flavor the

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This array of canned goods is a small representation of the 25 different varieties she will gather to display at local fairs in the fall. Each is carefully packed in wide-mouthed jars and awaits the judge's inspection.

Homestead Notes



Esther maintains a huge garden to supply the produce she likes to preserve, but she also enjoys having fresh flowers and will display some of those at the fair if the weather cooperates. She admits that once harvest begins, all hoeing and weeding stop for her.