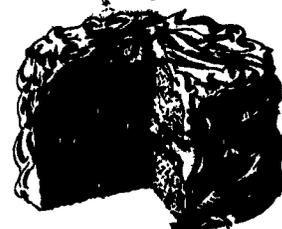


Home On The Range



Canning With Less Sugar

How do you can fruits with less sugar?

Will fruit spoil if sugar is not used in the canning process?

These are a few of the questions that many of our readers ask when they want to cut down on their sugar intake.

The answers to these questions and many more are answered in today's column. Thanks to Alletta Schadler, Lebanon County Extension home economist, and Phyllis Wright, Warren County Extension home economist, who compiled this information.

If you have more questions about canning or freezing with less sugar, contact your county Penn State Extension office, which keeps up-to-date on safe preserving methods and on the many new products marketed as sugar substitutes.

Sugar performs several functions in canning and freezing. It adds sweetness, of course (and also calories), but the sugar also helps firm the texture of fruits such as peaches and pears. Colors of fruits are also brighter when the syrup or liquid contains sugar. The fruits keep color and texture for a longer period of time and are not as susceptible to fading from light exposure. Sugar is not necessary to prevent fruit from spoiling. Proper food handling and adequate processing in a boiling water bath canner will allow you to successfully preserve fruits with little or no added sugar.

You may want to reduce the sugar you use for a variety of reasons — flavor, calories or for special dietary restrictions. You can substitute water pack or diluted juice for sugar syrups when canning. You can freeze some fruits dry without any added sugar or syrup. Others may work better with a water or juice syrup substitute.

Canning Fruit

Use the hot-pack method of filling jars — that is heat the fruit in boiling juice or water or syrup before filling into jars. This will prevent shrinkage of fruit during the water bath processing, prevent floating fruit and minimize the darkening of fruit during storage.

Headspace in jars should be adjusted to 1/2 inch. A larger amount of headspace will increase discoloration of fruit at the top of the jar.

All foods must be processed in

a boiling water bath canner or pressure canner following filling into jars. Open kettle canning is not recommended for any food.

Select ripe but firm fruit for sugarless canning. Add 500 mg. ascorbic acid to each quart of fruit canned to help reduce color change. Add it directly to each quart jar after crushing the tablet.

Note that fruits canned with water, juice or very light syrups are best stored in cool dark places to prevent color fading.

Fruit Juice Packs

Select a compatible flavor fruit juice for the canning syrup. Frozen unsweetened juices can be used. Bottled unsweetened juices can also be used. Frozen apple juice concentrate works very well. You may want to dilute the apple juice with extra water to cut the apple flavor and reduce calories further. Instead of diluting each can of concentrate with 3 cans of water, try adding 5 cans of water. Record your proportions and label jars so you will know the concentration your family prefers. Here are some flavor suggestions:

- Frozen Apple Juice- with peaches, pears, apricots, plums, red or white.

- Frozen Unsweetened Blush Grape Juice- sweet cherries.

- Frozen Pineapple Juice- with pears or peaches. This is a cloudy looking pack but is very tasty. Frozen pineapple juice has fresher flavor.

- Bottled Sweetened White Grape Juice- with pears, peaches, apricots. Dilute this bottled juice. You might want to mix it with another juice. Red grape juice might be used with plums or red cherries.

(Note to diabetics: The juice of fruit canned this way must be considered as fruit juice in your diet plan.)

Some families find fruits canned this year too bland and tart — especially if you've been accustomed to heavy sugar syrups. You could make a fruit juice/light syrup using 1 cup of sugar to 6 cups of juice or water for a trial to see if your family will accept the change. There is no point in canning a large amount of food in a way your family refuses to eat! Test flavor combinations in small quantities.

...A Word About Honey- Honey is a liquid concentrated



Health concerns encourage many people to preserve food with less sugar. This requires new recipes and new methods.

sweetener and should be avoided by diabetics and others needing to reduce calories. It has more calories per tablespoon and it does taste sweeter than an equal amount of sugar so a little goes a long way. It can be used in canning syrups if you select a mild-flavored variety.

...Fructose is a sweet tasting sugar found naturally in fruit, juices and honey. While it tastes twice as sweet as sugar and so you need use less, it must be considered as a sugar by diabetes.

...And Artificial Sweeteners- Artificial sweeteners should be added to canned or frozen fruit just before serving. Do not use in canning syrups. The heat of processing many cause some sweeteners to lose sweetening power and others may cause an unpleasant after taste or flavor change.

See chart at the end of this paper for syrup ratios.

Freezing Fruit

The freezing process always causes changes in the texture of fruits because of the fragile cell structures and high water content of the food itself. When ice crystals form, the cell walls are damaged by sharp edges so that when the food is thawed, the juices leak out and the food is "mushy" or soft. The higher the water content, the greater the chance of texture change. For example, strawberries get mushier after freezing than cherries.

The speed of freezing and

temperature of the freezer will also affect the final texture of the fruit. Faster and colder is best. Zero degrees storage is preferred.

Good moisture/vapor-proof packaging will help prevent moisture loss and color fading.

Some varieties of fruits freeze better than others because they stay firmer and keep color and fla-

vor better. Consult your county Extension office for variety suggestions. Talk to your grower. Keep records so you know what works best.

Sugar syrups or dry sugar added to fruit will help fix the color, and firm texture, too. If you do all the other things right — select solid

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Featured Recipe

Grilled vegetables make easy, delicious accompaniments for grilled beef. Grilling enhances the natural flavor of many vegetables while imparting a light smoky flavor.

Most vegetables need no preparation for grilling other than cleaning, and a light brushing with vegetable or olive oil.

This vegetable grilling guide is from the Pennsylvania Beef Council. Look for stories on beef representative and recipes for beef in this section of the paper.

Bell peppers: Cut peppers in half lengthwise; remove seeds. Brush lightly with oil, if desired. Grill over medium coals, turning occasionally, until tender, 12 to 15 minutes.

Corn: Pull back husks from corn leaving husks attached to base. Remove corn silk. Fold husks back around corn; tie at the end of each ear with string or strip of one of husks. Soak corn in cold water 1 to 2 hours. Remove from water. Grill over medium coals, turning frequently, until tender, about 20 to 30 minutes.

Eggplant: Cut small (about 3 to 4 ounces each) Japanese-type eggplants in half lengthwise. Brush lightly with oil. Grill over medium coals, turning occasionally, until tender, 10 to 12 minutes.

Zucchini or Yellow Squash: Cut small (about 3 to 4 ounces each) squash in half lengthwise. Brush lightly with oil. Grill over medium coals, turning occasionally, until tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

Onions: Slice onions 1/2-inch thick. Brush lightly with oil. Grill over medium coals, turning occasionally, until tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

Tomatoes: Slice tomatoes 1/2-3/4-inch thick. Brush lightly with oil. Grill over medium coals, turning once, until heated through, 3 to 5 minutes.

Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for the topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522. Recipes should reach our office one week before publishing date.

August

- 14- Zucchini
- 21- Tomatoes
- 28- Apples

September

- 4- National Chicken Month