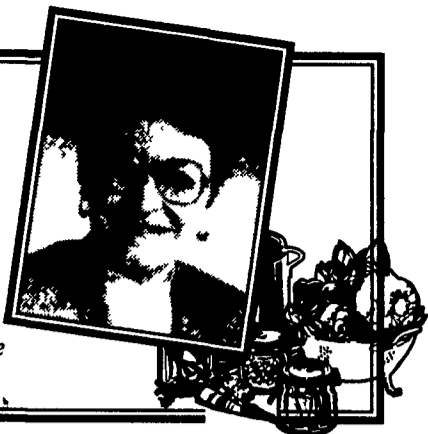


Consuming Thoughts

by
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Penn State Extension Home Economist For Berks Co.



Are you planning to can or preserve peppers, garlic, or any other moist vegetable-in-oil this season? If the answer is yes, be sure to follow modern tested recipes and the recommendations from your Penn State Cooperative Extension office or US FDA Guidelines.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) recommends that consumers not prepare any homemade vegetable-or spice-in-oil, - margarine or butter recipe for extended storage.

Why is there concern about canning vegetables in oil?

Peppers, onions, garlic, spices and oils of all types are low in acid. Tomatoes are borderline acid. Air cannot readily pass through oil, so moist, low-acid vegetables covered with oil are

in a low-oxygen, low-acid environment. This makes them potentially susceptible to the growth of Clostridium botulinum bacteria spores. Clostridium botulinum bacteria are widespread in the environment and may be found on various kinds of produce, including peppers and garlic. The spores of Clostridium botulinum are harmless in an air or oxygen free or air-free environment such as oil, the spores, if present, could multiply and produce the deadly toxin that causes botulism.

Bacteria multiply quickly at room temperature. Each microorganism becomes 2 in 20 minutes, each of those 2 splits into 4 in 40 minutes, then into 8 in one hour, into 64 in two hours,

into 4,096 in 4 hours and so on. In just 8 hours one little bacteria has become 16,777,216 microorganisms?

If Clostridium botulinum is present and multiplies even to a small extent, toxins are given off that produce botulism, an often fatal foodborne illness.

A moist vegetable-in-oil mixture sitting on a dining room table is at room temperature. If it is present, the bacteria that causes botulism has the perfect environment in which to produce its deadly toxin in a low-acid, low-oxygen, room temperature environment! We have no way to tell if Clostridium botulinum is present or not.

Refrigerating these mixtures can prevent the growth of any microorganisms present. Although vegetables can be made more acid by covering them with vinegar or lemon-juice before putting oil over them (and this is done commercially), few university-or US FDA-test consumer recipes exist that use this technique.

The US FDA recommends that consumers not prepare any homemade vegetables- or spice-in-oil, - margarine or butter recipes for extended storage because the protective additives used in commercial mixes are not generally available for

homemade products. Consumers are urged to refrigerate all such products and to dispose immediately of any products suspected to be spoiled or to have been stored unrefrigerated.

The "Let's Preserve Peppers" fact sheet is available from your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office and contains a recipe for making "Marinated Peppers" that is researched-tested. The recipe calls for a tested proportion of peppers, onion, garlic, horseradish and oregano, lemon juice and vinegar, and the mixture is processed in a boiling water bath canner to preserve it safely. Once opened, the product should be stored in the refrigerator and eaten within three weeks. The "Let's Preserve Peppers" fact sheet also has modern tested recipes for pickled peppers, pickled hot peppers, pickled pepper-onion relish and pickled corn-pepper relish.

To request "Let's Preserve Peppers" send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Berks County Cooperative Extension, Berks County Ag Center 1238 County Welfare Road, Leesport, PA 19533-0520.

Brown Bag

(Continued from Page B6)

Following the Dietary Guidelines doesn't mean eliminating all your favorite lunch-time foods—but it does mean balancing the foods that are higher in fat, sugars, or sodium with other foods that contain less of these components.

Brown Bag Checklist

How does your brownbag lunch rate? Answer the following questions to see how many food groups your lunch usually includes.

How often does your lunch contain the following:

- Fruits or fruit juices?
- Vegetables or vegetable juices?
- Enriched breads, pastas, or other grain products (especially wholegrain types)?
- Lean meat, poultry, fish, or alternates (dry beans, peas, lentils, peanuts, and eggs)?
- Lowfat milk cheese or yogurt?

Now take a look at your answers. Did your lunch include something from each of the groups almost daily or did some of your answers fall in the "sel-

(Turn to Page B8)



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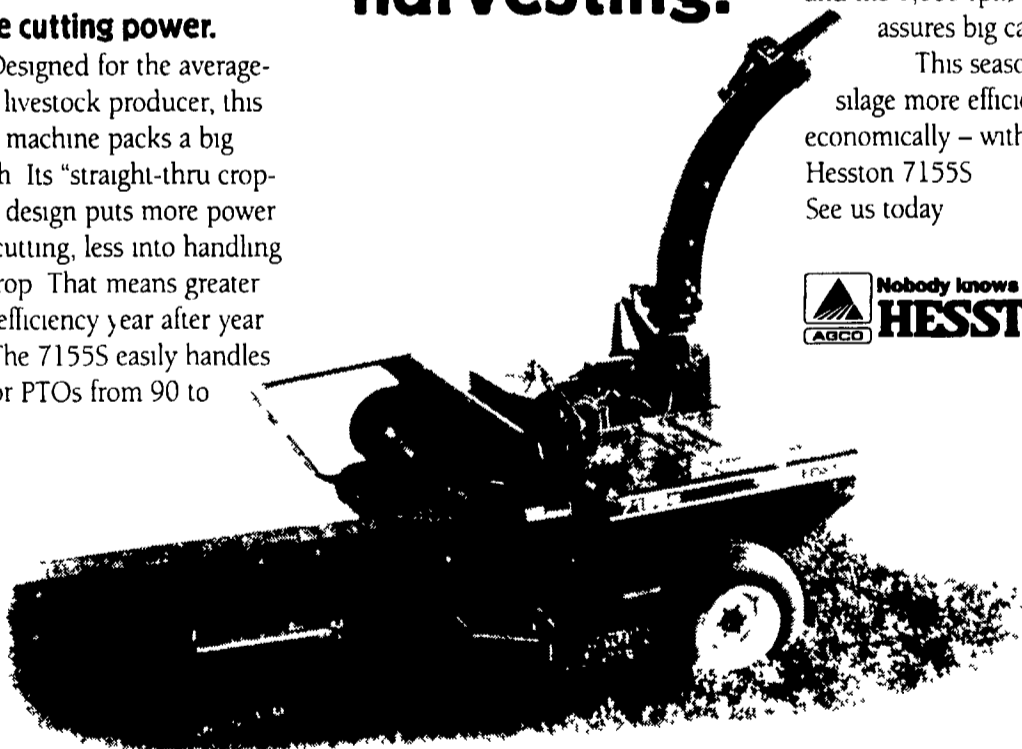
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