

Ida's Notebook

by
Ida Risser



Farmers can always find something to do. Even if it rains or snows, they have machinery to repair and other jobs to complete. And there is the always-present paperwork which nowadays means computer work for many farmers or their wives.

Therefore, it is not easy to get away for a vacation. Who will milk the cows, tend the chickens, and keep the operation going? Sometimes a "day" vacation is the answer.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit a local museum. I was amazed at the size of "The Conestoga Area Historical Society" buildings. I expected an old schoolhouse filled with local artifacts. Instead, we saw a large exhibit of Conestoga Indian artifacts.

We also saw a number of small houses that had been moved from their original lo-

cations to the village of Conestoga. These buildings were mid-18th and 19th century buildings that depicted rural life in Lancaster County. Items displayed ranged in size from a Conestoga wagon to tiny arrowheads that were found in the local area.

Did you know that there are 18 museums in Lancaster County? They cover more than 300 years of our history. In going over the long list, I've discovered that there are still four sites that I have not visited. Some have been visited many times while a few hold little interest for me.

Maybe someday I'll get to see more museums if I ever catch up with work here at home. Believe it or not, we still have not processed all of our own peaches and apples even though we've done our best to share them with others.

Well Preserved

The Well Preserved news column is prepared by Lancaster County Cooperative Extension. It includes food preservation information and questions received in the office.

Reduced Sugar Food Preservation

Some reasons for reducing sugar in canning are a flavor preference for less sweetness, reduced calories, and special dietary restrictions. While sugar helps fruits keep their bright color and firm texture, it 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.

What can be used in place of sugar to can fruits?

Frozen or bottled unsweetened juices can be used in place of sugar syrup. Reconstituted frozen apple juice concentrate works well with peaches, pears, apricots, plums, and red or white sweet cherries. It can be diluted with extra water to cut the apple flavor and reduce calories further. For example, use five cans of water to reconstitute the juice instead of the usual three. Frozen pineapple juice works especially well with pears or peaches. Frozen pineapple juice gives a fresher flavor than the canned juice.



Diluted sweetened white grape juice works well with pears, peaches, or apricots while red grape juice complements plums and red cherries. Diabetics need to consider the fruit juice used in canning this way as a fruit serving.

Is honey suitable for canning?

Honey is a liquid concentrated sweetener and should be avoided by diabetics and others needing to reduce calories. It has more calories per tablespoon and does taste sweeter than an equal amount of sugar. A mild flavored variety of honey can be used in canning syrups.

Can artificial sweeteners be used in canning?

Do not add artificial sweeteners to canning syrups. The heat of processing may cause sweeteners to lose sweetening power or cause an unpleasant after taste or flavor change. Aspartame is destroyed by long cooking. Artificial sweeteners should be added

to canned or frozen fruit just before serving.

What is the sweetener fructose?

Fructose is a sweet tasting sugar found in fruit, juices, and honey. It tastes twice as sweet as sugar so that less can be used, but it still must be considered a sugar by diabetics.

Is it safe to can fruits such as apples and pears in water?

Use only the hot pack method when canning fruit without sugar. That is, cook the fruit in water until hot throughout before packing the hot fruit into hot jars. Add boiling water to cover and seal. Process in the boiling water bath according to USDA timetables.

What is a light sugar syrup?

A light sugar syrup uses a lower proportion of sugar to water than a medium or heavy syrup? Penn State's Let's Preserve publication gives these sugar concentrations for canning syrups: Very light syrup uses 1/4 cups sugar to 10 1/2 cups water; light syrup uses 2/4 cups sugar to 9 cups water; and medium syrup uses 3/4 cups sugar to 8 1/4 cups water. You can experiment with lighter syrups to determine the reduced level of sweetness you find acceptable.

Can artificial sweeteners be used in jams and jellies?

A few specially designed recipes are available for jams and jellies using artificial sweeteners. Do not use artificial sweeteners or reduce the amount of sugar in

a traditional jelly recipe because the product will not gel properly. There are commercial pectin products available specially designed for lower amounts of sugar. Some fruit spreads have no added sugar but are concentrated fruit mixtures that taste sweet because of the concentration of the natural sugars. Natural sugars have the same caloric content of sucrose or table sugar.

Are artificial sweeteners safe?

Food additives including artificial sweeteners must be approved for safety by the Food and Drug Administration or be grandfathered in on the GRAS list (Generally Recognized as Safe) as is saccharin. Most people can use saccharin, aspartame, and acesulfame-K safely in moderation. A very small group of people with the rare hereditary disease phenylketonuria need to avoid aspartame. Stevia, a product derived from a South American shrub, cannot be sold as a sweetener because its safety has been questioned by published studies. FDA considers stevia an unapproved food additive.

More information about canning with less sugar and some recipes are available by calling you local extension office and asking for the publication, Let's Preserve: Reduced Sugar Food Preservation.

If you have food preservation questions, a home economist is available to answer questions on Wednesday, 9 a.m.- 1 p.m., call (717) 394-6851 or write Penn State Cooperative Extension, Lancaster County, 1383 Arcadia Road, Room. 1, Lancaster, PA, 17601.

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