



Preserve it Fresh, Preserve it Safe

Volume 3, Issue 2

March/April 2017

Harvesting spring vegetables

Asparagus—Harvest when the spears are 6-12 inches long at ground level, before the top begins to fern out. Store upright in a jar. Should last in the refrigerator up to one week.

Lettuce—Harvest while the leaves are still tender. Lasts one week if stored properly.

Peas—Harvest while the pods are still tender. Expected storage time is one week.

Spinach—Harvest while the leaves are still tender. Will last 10 days to two weeks when stored properly.

Green onions—Harvest when the bulbs attain desired size. Cut off roots and remove tops, leaving an inch of green. Lasts up to two weeks when stored properly.

Use a refrigerator thermometer to ensure that your refrigerator is at 40 degrees F or below for food safety.



Keep early spring produce fresh and safe

It is always a special treat to eat the first fresh homegrown vegetables each spring. It is important to make sure those special morsels are harvested and stored to assure maximum freshness and safety.

Hand-washing is one of the most important aspects of food handling. Harmful bacteria and germs are easily passed from hands to produce. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with warm soapy water before harvesting or preparing your fresh garden bounty.

Early spring produce, such as spinach, lettuce, green onions, peas and asparagus, should be stored in cold, moist storage for optimal freshness. Cold, moist storage means that food should be kept at 32 to 36 degrees F with 95 to 100 percent relative humidity for optimum quality. Your home refrigerator is most likely set at around 40 degrees F and has a 50 to 60 percent relative humidity. Since those settings are still the best option for most people, place vegetables in perforated plastic bags to increase the freshness of your early spring produce while it's stored in the refrigerator. This increases the humidity and shelf life of your produce.

Wash produce just before you are ready to eat it. If you wash produce before storing it, the extra moisture can potentially promote bacterial growth and spoilage. While it is tempting to use a detergent or produce wash on fresh produce, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not recommend it because those cleaners may leave a residue and have not been proven more effective than clean, running water.

For more information on harvesting and storing fresh produce, see <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/g6226>, <http://www.bookstore.ksu.edu/pubs/MF2647.pdf> or http://missourifamilies.org/foodsafety/newsletters/Handout_storingproduce.pdf.



Why is table salt not recommended for canning and pickling?

The table salt we buy at the grocery store is usually not pure sodium chloride. Instead it is a mixture of sodium chloride, potassium iodide, dextrose and an anti-caking additive called calcium silicate. This anti-caking agent absorbs moisture inside the package that would otherwise cause the salt to stick together and not flow freely in the salt shaker. The potassium iodide is added as a public health measure to reduce the incidence of goiter caused by iodine deficiency, while dextrose is a sugar that stabilizes the iodide.

Table salt is used for baking, cooking and normal meal use. However, it is not recommended for canning recipes because the calcium silicate may cause clouding or settle to the bottom of jar. Furthermore, the iodide may discolor some foods. Neither of these effects make the food harmful to eat. However, the visual quality of the product is adversely affected.

Also, it's best to avoid using kosher salt for pickling and canning, as it will not measure the same as canning salt. Canning salt is a very fine salt. Kosher salt generally is composed of very large crystals and can vary in density, so it is difficult to determine exactly how much of the large-grained kosher salt it takes to provide an equivalent amount of salting power to a recipe based on canning salt.

Canning and pickling salts do not contain potassium iodide, dextrose or calcium silicate and thus can be used for cooking, baking, canning and pickling as well as for the table. Because anti-caking agents are not added, they may form lumps in humid weather or if exposed to moisture, and should be stored in an airtight container or resealable plastic bag.

Adapted from Penn State Extension. n.d. Canning and pickling salt: Why is table salt not recommended for canning and pickling? <http://extension.psu.edu/food/preservation/faq/canning-and-pickling-salt>.



Can I sell my canned foods?

Has anyone ever told you that your homemade jelly or salsa or other canned food is so delicious that you should sell it? In some cases, this is legal, but in other cases, it is not. In Kansas and Missouri, any canned goods sold to grocery stores or other distributors, or products sold across state lines, require a food processor's license and cannot be produced in a regular home kitchen.

In Kansas, fruit jams, jellies and canned fruits sold directly to consumers, such as through a farmers market or at a craft show, do not require a license and can be made in a home kitchen. Selling other canned products, such as sauerkraut, pickles, canned vegetables and most salsas, does require a license and so cannot be made at home. These product sales also require the processor to attend Better Process Control School, available online and offered March 27-28 in Sedalia, Missouri. In Missouri, if you're selling less than \$50,000 worth of products per year directly to consumers, fruit jams and jellies do not require licensing for sales and can be made at home. Other products require a license and cannot be produced at home. Check with your local public health inspector before preparing any food for sale, as regulations may vary in different localities.

More information on Kansas regulations for selling canned foods is available at www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3138.pdf. Missouri regulations can be found at <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/N1304>.

Local contact information:

University of Missouri Extension

University of Missouri, Lincoln University, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Local Extension Councils Cooperating. MU Extension is an equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating. K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.