



How-To: **PRESERVING PRODUCE**

When there's a bounty of produce from local farms and your garden, a little time and effort can yield some tasty and healthful food well into the winter months. Here are three options for preserving seasonal produce.



BLANCHING KALE BEFORE FREEZING



FILLING FREEZER-SAFE CONTAINERS WITH BLANCHED KALE



FROZEN KALE

FREEZING

Freezing is a simple, quick way to deal with extras. Rinse and throw berries, peppers, and tomatoes in the freezer without any cooking at all. Vegetables often require blanching – boiling for a certain amount of time and quickly cooling, to stop the produce from continuing to ripen in the freezer. Be sure to label all containers with the date and contents, as it can be hard to determine what's in a frosty freezer package.

- Chop peppers and tomatoes into the sizes you'll most likely want to use later. For example, pepper strips are great for stir fries, chopped peppers work well in omelets. Tomatoes can be left whole or chopped. Then pack them tightly into a freezer-safe container.
- Berries freeze well on cookie sheets (this keeps them from sticking together). After they are frozen, pack them into freezer safe containers.
- Blanch cooking greens for 2 minutes. Don't wait for the water to return to boiling – count the 2 minutes from when you place the greens in the water. Cool in ice water and drain well before packing tightly in a freezer bag or container.
- Blanch fresh corn for 4-6 minutes. Cool quickly in ice water. Cut the corn from the cob & pack into freezer containers.
- Shred zucchini & blanch for 1.5 minutes before cooling in ice water. Drain & pack into freezer containers.

DRYING

Dried produce is shelf stable and doesn't take as much space as food preserved with other methods. In Pittsburgh's climate, the easiest way to dry produce is with a food dehydrator. Herbs can be dried by hanging them upside down in a paper bag (to protect from dust) or spread on a cookie sheet in a car. Crumble them when dry and store in an airtight container away from light.

CANNING

Canning takes more time and effort than freezing but yields a product that can be stored on the shelf and is ready to use anytime. Canning involves placing raw or cooked produce in jars, then placing the jars in boiling water for a specific amount of time, to kill pathogens. Make a day of canning bushels of produce, or choose to do a small batch anytime you've got some surplus.

- New to canning? Find an experienced friend to can with, or take a local course, often offered by extension agencies and food organizations.
- Consult a recently published book or check an extension agency website for up-to-date canning guidelines.



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JAM MADE FROM FRESH,
SEASONAL BERRIES

- Pick up supplies online or at a grocery store – call to make sure they carry what you need.
- Consider borrowing equipment from friends.
- Plan an evening canning session. It's cooler than canning during the day, and can be a great time to tackle small projects like a batch of jam.
- For jam and jelly with less sugar, try Pomona pectin, which allows a reduced amount of sugar, or substituting honey or fruit juice.