



Tips & Techniques: Preserving the Harvest

For all of you urban harvesters – this is the time of gathering the fruits of your labors. Hopefully bright tomatoes are spilling out of bowls on your counters, and your refrigerators are bursting at the seams with smooth zucchinis, crisp cucumbers, crunchy peppers, and curly bunches of kale.

In particularly good growing seasons – and maybe even this year, now that we’ve gotten some rain – you may be racking up too much produce to eat right now, even after sharing with your friends, families, and neighbors. This week we’ll give you a few tips for dealing with the extras in creative and resourceful ways. Often, spending a little extra time to preserve food during the growing season can lead to tasty rewards in the winter months.

Freeze It!

Freezing is a simple, quick way to deal with extras. Notably, you can throw berries, peppers, and tomatoes in the freezer without any cooking at all. Rinse the produce before freezing. Be sure to label all containers with the date and contents, as it can be harder than you’d think 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 (fancy food-preservation term for boil, then remove from water & quickly cool) **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. It’s so nice to have something green in the winter! Toss them into soups & stews.
- Blanch fresh **corn** for 4 (small ears) – 6 (large ears) 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.

Make Pesto!

Pesto isn’t just basil’s domain any longer (although a nice basil pesto is hard to beat!). If you’ve got a surplus of arugula or parsley, try using them instead. Here’s a link to a recipe for [mixed herb pesto](#). Pesto can last quite a while in the fridge, or freeze it for extended use.

Jar it Up!

Even with its resurgence in popularity, canning has the reputation of requiring gargantuan effort. Keep in mind, modern canning can be a small-batch, as-you-have-produce (and time!) event. No need to can bushels of peaches or tomatoes – just 6 pints of blackberry jam or 8 quarts of your own homegrown tomatoes can supplement your winter fare. Here are some tips:

- New to canning? Take a course. Here are some still on this year's schedule!
 - [Penn State](#)
 - [Slow Foods](#)
- Consult a recently published book or check an extension agency website for up-to-date canning guidelines.
- Pick up supplies online at [Lehman's](#) store or locally at the Giant Eagle at the Waterworks in Aspinwall.
- Find canning friends. If you don't have equipment and are just getting started, borrow it or work with someone who has a canner.
- If you find it relaxing or fun, can in an evening. It's cooler than canning during the day, and can be a great time to tackle small projects like a batch of jam.
- Want to make jam, but intimidated by the amount of sugar that most recipes include? Try [Pomona](#) pectin, which allows you to substitute fruit juice, honey, or use reduced amounts of sugar.
- Buried in canned tomatoes, but you're hankering for some plum jam? Plan a canning swap! Find some food-preserving friends and trade your home-canned goods.

Dry it!

The easiest way to dry produce is with a [food dehydrator](#), especially in this damp climate. You can, however, easily dry herbs in your car! Just pick a sunny day, & spread them on a cookie sheet. The added benefit is a fresh-smelling car!

Got some food preserving tips or questions? We'd love to hear them. Just send a quick email to info@growpittsburgh.org.