

Daphne Richards, County Extension Agent-Horticulture

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Travis County  
1600-B Smith Rd, Austin, TX 78721 512-854-9600  
travismg@ag.tamu.edu

## HOME PRESERVING

*Capturing one of life's bounties in a jar!*

Fresh produce from the grocer, farmers markets and our own gardens entices each of us. From peppers, tomatoes, okra and peaches available at road-side stands to kale and chard harvested from a window box, the simple pleasure of eating natural, healthy, delicious produce can be extended year round with safe, proven and simple techniques.

In the presence of air and water, micro-organisms such as molds, yeast and bacteria can grow in our food, leading to spoilage. Several methods used to prevent spoilage are heat, acid, sugar, fermentation, freezing and refrigeration, often in combination.

**HEAT** – Most micro-organisms are destroyed at the temperature of boiling water. Canning is a term many are familiar with used to describe the processing of jars filled with produce at specific temperatures for a designated amount of time. Boiling water and high-pressure canning are methods most often utilized by home processors.

**ACID** – Acid prevents the growth of many micro-organisms. Numerous foods we enjoy are acidic. Most fruits and tomatoes are high-acid foods and may be processed with a boiling water canner. The addition of acid such as vinegar or lemon juice allows many low acid fruits and vegetables to be safely preserved with a boiling water canner, a process most know as pickling. High pressure canning increases processing temperatures and is another option for low acid foods.

**SUGAR** – Micro-organisms need water in which to grow. Sugar in high concentrations reduces the available water in foods, minimizing the environment for microbial activity. Many of our jams, jellies and preserves are processed this way.

**FERMENTATION** – Fermentation is the utilization of yeast or bacteria under anaerobic conditions to effectively “pickle” produce. Often the resulting product is further processed in a boiling water canner. Sauerkraut is an example of a fermented vegetable.

**FREEZING** – Storage of foods at very low temperatures prevents micro-organism growth. Slightly cooking, or blanching vegetables prior to freezing inhibits enzymatic activity and enhances freshness.

**REFRIGERATION** – Many foods may be prepared and processed for consumption within days, weeks or even months, and stored in a refrigerator.

A detailed guide to preparing and preserving foods may be found at:

**The National Center for Home Preservation**

<http://nchfp.uga.edu/>