Planning (and Planting) for Food Preservation

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The garden catalogs are appearing and spring is right around the corner. Whether your garden takes up the whole back yard or is just a few pots on the deck, one aspect of planning the vegetable garden is to consider, “What do I want to preserve from my garden this year? What quantity and varieties do I need to plant in order to have the right amount available for preserving?”

Make a list of the vegetables you want to grow to eat fresh and what you want to preserve. Consider the amount needed and lay the garden out on paper. Don’t forget to plan for crop rotation to reduce disease and insect problems. In other words, don’t plant tomatoes in the same place year after year.

A few things to consider:

**Herbs:** Fresh herbs are amazing, but maybe you’d like to try freezing or drying herbs. Chopped cilantro, parsley and chives are great herbs for freezing. Basil, sage and many others are easy to dry. Will you plant them in the garden? Add a few herbs to your flower bed? Enjoy fragrant pots of herbs on the deck or windowsill? Plant them by seed or purchase herb plants?

**Salsa:** Salsa is popular with home preservers. Any type of tomatoes can be made into salsa but a meaty roma-type tomato (or paste tomato) works especially well. Tested salsa recipes need to be used to be sure home canned salsa is safe.

Canned whole, quartered or crushed tomatoes or tomato juice tastes great all winter long. Any flavorful tomato variety can be canned. Although tomatoes seem like an acidic food, the level of
acidity varies based on tomato variety, soil and even weather. Follow tested recipes/procedures to acidify each jar of home canned tomatoes with either lemon juice or citric acid. Tomatoes can be canned in a water bath or in a pressure canner.

**Vegetables:** Carrots, winter squash, green beans, beets and corn are vegetables that can easily be preserved by freezing. When planning the garden, consider how much freezer space you have available. Canning these vegetables requires a pressure canner as they are low acid foods. ISU Extension and Outreach can help as you plan for gardening and food preservation.

- Soil testing- Contact your local ISU Extension and Outreach office for soil sample bags and guidelines
- Publications: Available at your local ISU Extension office or at the online ISU Extension store https://store.extension.iastate.edu/ (many of the publications are free to download)
  PM 870B – Container vegetable gardening
  PM 819 – Planting a home vegetable garden
  PM 534 – Planting and harvesting times for garden vegetables
  PM 1239 – Growing and drying herbs
  PM 638 – Canning and freezing tomatoes
  PM 1366 – Canning fruit spreads
  HS 21 – Canning salsa
  PM 1045 – Freezing fruits and vegetables
  PM 1044 – Canning vegetables

- Food Preservation Courses: Contact the local ISU Extension office to find out if any Food Preservation 101 classes are being offered in your area; Complete the online Preserve the Taste of Summer Course http://www.extension.iastate.edu/human sciences/preserve-taste-summer and participate in a hands on workshop.

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