

Preserving the Taste of Summer 7-7-2015

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SPEAKERS

Mary Crisco, Christa Hartsook

C Christa Hartsook 00:00

Welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This is episode two, where I interview Mary Crisco nutrition and health specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, to talk about food preservation, and the upcoming preserving the taste of summer workshops. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program coordinator, and we hope you enjoy the show. Mary, can you tell me a little bit about why you think interest in canning and preserving produce seems to be growing?

M Mary Crisco 00:31

Because people are getting more interested in local foods. People are thinking about where their food is coming from, and how far their food has to journey to get to them. They're thinking more about, you know, am I buying from my local farmer? Or am I supporting the local businesses and, and because of that a lot more people are growing their own backyard vegetables, and sometimes even fruits, because it's freshest. And it's a for a lot of people gardening is a very relaxing activity. But the the downside, sometimes as you have more zucchini than you know, what to do with.

C Christa Hartsook 01:15

very true.

M Mary Crisco 01:16

So people are one reason is the upswing in the interest in in fresh produce eating more fresh produce gardening. But also, sometimes people are thinking about their health. Because you know, your typical canned goods in the in the stores have more salt in them that than is

actually good for you. Or they might have more sugar in them. That's actually good for you. And some people kind of like the idea of I want to know what's in my food. So I'm gonna make my own gosh darn tomato sauce.

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Christa Hartsook 01:51

There you go. What are some ways that our small farm owners or acreage owners that are listening to our podcasts could get started? What do they need to know?

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Mary Crisco 02:01

Well, a lot of small acreage farmers always already do preservation. Because it's still a family tradition in a lot of families. And it's still it's, it's, it's a traditional way for farmers to supplement their own diet. If you have a large enough plot, that you are getting a surplus of certain fruits or vegetables. It can save you money on your on your household budget, to can your own food. Also, some people are thinking about, you know, small farmers are thinking about going to marketing their stuff at farmer's markets. And so, you know, maybe they're an apple farmer, and they have apples here. And they thought, well, it would probably increase the appeal of my stand if I had some nifty little homemade apple butter or, you know, preserves things like that. The only difference between making it for yourself and making it for the public is that you've got to be properly licensed. So you've got to conform with the Department of Inspections as an appeals of Iowa. What are their requirements if you're going to sell preserved foods. And the DIA is in my guess every state classifies preserved foods as a special, special hazard food process. It can be dangerous to process food if you don't do it correctly. So

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Christa Hartsook 03:42

not something to play around with.

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Mary Crisco 03:44

Yeah, so you here at ISU extension, we have pamphlets on how to start a home based food business, what you need to do to check out the legal requirements. For example, say you want to market a salsa or barbecue sauce, if you want to sell those retail. processing of these food products without the appropriate license is a violation of state law. And of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, you need a special food processing plant license from the state before you can even get going with it. The rules might be a little different for jams, because jams are one of the safest things we can preserve. Because after all, they are four fifth sugar. And you know the sugar take up so much of the available moisture. It's really hard for bacteria to get along. But there's still restrictions on selling home canned jams, too. So what you got to think about is for what purpose do I want to can and secondly, how much is it going to cost me on the scale that I want to do it. Because if you're doing it for, for just your home and some friends, then after your first year it can become very cost effective. You do if you don't already have one, you know, it'll cost you \$70, \$80, \$100bucks to get pressure canner. Or if you only want to do fruits and tomatoes and pickles, and jams, you can get by with a hot water bath canner, which is significantly less maybe you can get one for \$50 or \$60. You can buy one box

of canning kit tools for like \$10 bucks from, from a hardware store. The jars are an investment because a jar plus the lid plus the school ring can be as much as 50 cents each. So that's why I say you might not save a heck of a lot of money your first time out, compared to what it would cost you if you ran out to the store for this canned good but you can reuse the jars. And that's, that's the main savings. Also remember, you got to be ready to start preserving just at the point of harvest. You can't just pick things and let it sit and can it or freeze it or whatever at your leisure. You if you want good preserved foods, you got to pick it at the peak of freshness.

C Christa Hartsook 06:24

Mary, I went out this morning and picked green beans before I went to work and I fully intend on freezing green beans tonight. But for our listeners what what things should be frozen versus canned? But what should we really think about?

M Mary Crisco 06:39

What you mainly have to think about is the kind of freezer you have, you got to have a freezer, that gets down to at least minus 10 or minus 10 would be ideal and you want a freezer that can maintain that temperature consistently. Because you'll get you'll get if you got the kind of freezer where people are opening it all the time, or for some reason, there's no consistency of the temperature, you're gonna get temperature abused, frozen foods full of crystals and it'll turn into mush. You also got to think about for what purpose are you preserving the food. Now if your main goal is I want to I want to eat food as close as possible to fresh then freezing is probably better than canning. You get better better color from canning. I mean from from freezing get better color you get, sometimes even the convenience is a little better, because you can freeze. You can freeze food on a tray individually and then put it in bags and then just pour your frozen food from the bag and tie it off use as needed. Some things you want to can because they might actually taste better canned. Like for example, if you're in the pies, and you like making pies from your own fruit, then it's a perfectly good deal to make your own to can your own pie filling, okay. You might also want to consider drying food too. Because if you're lacking in freezer space, or if energy is an issue for you, I mean the fridge and the freezer are like your create your biggest energy costs in the home. When you can dry things. It's amazingly handy. Dried fruit makes a wonderful snack and you can add it to and you can rehydrate it for you know like hot food deserts. And dried vegetables are dehydrated, dehydrate and rehydrate really well. Okay, for stews and camping trips. So it depends on what you eat, and what you want to eat and whether you can afford a deep freeze.

C Christa Hartsook 08:59

Sure. There are you mentioned kind of some guidelines that we need to follow when we're talking about canning or preserving you know, food. Where would somebody go Mary to find kind of those USDA recommendations.

M Mary Crisco 09:14

You can find good faith food safety information on your extension website. In Iowa we have an exceptionally good library of publications for just about any type of preservation method you

exceptionally good library of publications for just about any type of preservation method you can think of okay, as well as tips on harvesting and storing fruits and vegetables. So all you have to do is just Google ISU Extension online store. It'll take you there and search for preservation articles and you can download them for free.

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Christa Hartsook 09:50

Great.

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Mary Crisco 09:50

So easy to preserve is a program by the University of Georgia extension and you can find their website too. They sell a fantastic DVD, which shows you step by step exactly what you need to do. I would recommend you go with so, so easy to preserve, if we're going to be using videos. Because we know that extension agencies, they have food labs, they test the recipes. And it's very important that you use tested recipes. You want a recipe, that if you follow the instructions, exactly, you will end up with a product that is not only palatable, but also if you culture it on a petri dish, it will not result in any growth of pathogens. Sure. So the one thing we always tell people, human sciences, specialists in nutrition and wellness like myself, we're always stressing use tested recipes, and use the latest recipes. Another thing people don't understand is that things change. So things that might have worked for grandma don't work anymore. Here's an example, like a recent change in canning is that now all research tested recipes that involve tomatoes, advise adding an acid, vinegar or lemon juice, it's even there guarantee a low pH, a low acidity, for whatever tomato products are making. And the reason is, you know, even if you choose a variety that's known for its acidity, the actual acidity of any individual tomato depends on the soil it was grown in. But whether at the time the tomato was grown, how mature the tomato was when you picked it, because they lose acidity as they age. So it's a safeguard. Rather than take the pH of every tomato you chop up, let's just add, let's just add two tablespoons of vinegar. Why don't we? So use tested recipes, follow them to the letter. And when you get your canner, read the boring instruction book and follow it to the letter. If you don't like reading boring instruction books, you can take a class. We offer an online course called preserve the taste of summer, okay. And you could just Google that too, if you want to find it. It's ISU Extension preserved the taste of summer. It's a series of eight online classes so you can get it. If you've got internet connection, you can take it anywhere in the state. It costs \$35 For eight lessons, and it covers all the methods of preservation. Oh great, not just canning, but freezing dehydrating. And it addresses all the specialties too. Like jam making and pickle making and so on. So you can take the course and if you complete the course, you're entitled to a free hands on workshop from human sciences specialist in extension. And then when you also when you sign on, you'll see what classes are already on the schedule. So you can might, you might want to aim for them, you know, oh I'm interested in pickles. I want to go this pickling workshop. You can get through the online course fairly quickly. Because you can depending on what kind of learner you are, they have one, you can take a lesson by listening and watching a PowerPoint. Or you can download a PDF, read it and take a little quiz, okay, depending on how you how you like to, or how you like to learn and how much time you like to take and and people really, when they sign up the hands on they really enjoy it because it really is pretty deluxe considering that you don't really pay anything extra for it to share. My hands on workshops are four hours long. And we go through knife cutting techniques. We cover food safety, you know, how do you wash vegetables? It's very interesting because it is a science really it's the science of food processing. And you get to find

out well what does happen if I put too much sugar in this recipe? What does why is it that we have salt, you can clear up a lot of your misconceptions about canning by taking the course because we go into everything. And we we slowly step by step go through a simple tanning procedure. . In one, we have a jam workshop and a fruit dehydration together where we You know, we simply dry some bananas and apples and we make some blueberry, blueberry spice jam. We have a second workshop where we do pickles. And the simplest thing is we, you start with pickled baby carrots, and that teaches you the basics of hot water bath canning. And we also have a salsa making workshop, which is where we go into the pros and cons of pressure canning versus hot water bath canning of tomatoes. Important to remember, if you have any preservation guidebooks that predate 2009 You might as well throw them out, because we're learning all the time about new pathogens, new page levels that are necessary to resist the cluster being botulinum spore, it's really quite interesting. And that's what extension is all about really, is helping people with evolving science. So you got to give it a lot of thought before you get into it. And you got to do some calculations to how much money you'll spend, how much work you're going to put into it. Because another thing about preservation not about freezing or dehydrating, especially, but canning is a task that you cannot leave, right? You have to, you have to start on the vegetables are fresh, and you have to keep going with it and stay in the kitchen might be as long as four or five hours. And you also have to have a place to put those canned goods so that they sit undisturbed for 24 hours, allow them the chance to have a nice vacuum seal. So it's not it's not a casual cooking process. It's a very stepwise process. It's not something you want to do spontaneously,

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Christa Hartsook 17:08

right? Right, you have to plan and block out some time,

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Mary Crisco 17:11

plan it, make sure you have all the equipment, all the ingredients, make sure that your kitchen is not only clean but sanitized. Because you do want to be especially careful about microorganisms when you're when you're preserving food.

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Christa Hartsook 17:27

Sure. Where you also had some upcoming workshops you had mentioned.

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Mary Crisco 17:31

Well, I do have some classes, these are called preservation 101. And they're for people who either have not canned at all, and are thinking of doing it and are wondering about their home preservation alternatives. You know, they'll say, Well, maybe I should just freeze or maybe I should, maybe I can't I don't know, how much will it cost? What is what is the stuff tastes like? So I give an overview in preservation 101. And then there's also another audience I'd like to reach as people who have been canning for a while, who may not realize that their reference books are out of date. And that a few of the recommendations like how much pressure you should use in pressure canning certain things or how much acid you should use in a recipe.

Those things have changed. And I want to get the warning out about that to people who are doing it. So it'd be just kind of like a little refresher course. It explains it's basically a food safety class, because it explains just how you fight the botulism book. Now the I'm these classes are going to be given in three places in July, July 28, at 6:30. I'm doing a presentation at the Franklin Avenue library. Oh, these are all free, by the way. As a service to the public because one of our missions as nutritionist for extension is it's always been food safety has always been our mission. And we really would like people to enjoy their canning and not die from it. So the second is on July 30, at six o'clock at the forest Avenue outreach garden. That's a lovely place if you've never visited it. It's up 1511 12th Street in Des Moines. It's a presentation we give outside. And usually I serve some lemonade and iced tea. And then the same day or the same evening, I should say the 30th at seven o'clock. I'm going to be at the demonstration. The Urbandale demonstration garden. That's a garden maintained by Extension Master Gardeners. So you can learn about gardening when you go there. They become a regular series of presentations and the Demonstration Garden is at Dewey Gibb Rd. and 92nd Street in Urbandale.

C Christa Hartsook 20:06

Okay, perfect. Mary, thank you so much for your time is there anything else that we need to really talk about today

M Mary Crisco 20:12

can safely

C Christa Hartsook 20:16

Great. This podcast will be up on our website [www dot extension dot iastate.edu/smallfarms](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms), along with our acreage living newsletter and again we will link more details on the preserving the taste of summer workshops and Mary's upcoming classes. Thank you so much for listening