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A

wisp of white steam begins to spew from the vent in the lid of the pressure canner. After 10 minutes of watching the continuous stream of steam rise, volunteer Julia Jarvis announces to the Sacramento UC Master Food Preserver class that it is time to place the gauge on the canner. Once pressure is achieved, a timer is set for 25 minutes—the time the recipe requires for pressure canning chicken broth.

With the cool winter weather upon us, we tend to crave hearty soups and stews with a slice of crusty bread to enjoy on brisk evenings. You can make a large batch of soup and save some for later. And, if you start to long for the flavors and colors of summer, preserved local produce such as sweet corn can help bridge the gap until summer comes around again.

Pressure canning is one way you can preserve food to store and eat later. Other techniques include freezing, water bath canning, pickling and dehydrating.

Have you tried preserving food? Maybe you're nervous because you never learned the technique from your grandmother. Or, even if Grandma did show you, maybe you aren't confident that you're doing it the right way to maintain the quality and avoid making people sick.



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Good news: help is available. The University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources' Master Food Preserver Program guides people in how to preserve food properly. Program volunteers have been trained and certified by scientists in the most effective preservation methods for safely handling, processing and storing food at home.

Although the UC Master Food Preserver Program has been around since the 1980s, it has recently become more popular as consumers express an increased interest in locally grown foods.

There are 10 UC Cooperative Extension-based Master Food Preserver Programs in California, with one right here in Sacramento County.

"The UC Master Food Preserver Program volunteers serve as a reliable resource for research-based information on home food preservation," said Missy Gable, who oversees the program. "Since improperly handled food can cause serious illness, the volunteers provide important community outreach to help keep food safe in the home."

Meats, vegetables and any food containing meats or vegetables—such as soup or spaghetti sauce—must be pressure-canned correctly to prevent botulism, a paralyzing

illness that can be fatal, Gable warned.

A less serious consequence of not following a scientifically tested recipe is allowing foodborne microorganisms to spoil your canned foods.

This past November at a Wednesday night class in Sacramento, Jarvis and her fellow volunteers demonstrated how to pressure-can chicken and chicken broth using science-based canning recipes.

As the weighted knob jiggled and the canner began rocking and sputtering, Jarvis said, "If the pressure drops below the required level, you have to start the timer over."

During the two-hour class, the volunteers also demonstrated how to dehydrate meat, soups and vegetables. Participants were invited to taste samples of dehydrated soup, quiche, pesto and beef jerky.

"Each UC Master Food Preserver volunteer understands food safety and the necessary steps needed to safely preserve and store foods," Gable said. "They also understand the science behind home food preservation and help the public identify the best food preservation methods for the items they would like to store. Finally, they regularly point home cooks towards recipes that meet the necessary requirements for certain preservation techniques, such as adequate

SOME FUN USES FOR FROZEN, CANNED AND DEHYDRATED PRODUCTS

- Use drained and chopped canned cherries in your favorite brownie batter for Black Forest brownies.
- Perk up your cornbread for chili using bread and butter jalapeño pickles in your cornbread mix or simply use them as a zippy topping on chili.
- Basil-butter burgers? Take advantage of that basil plant that just wouldn't quit over the summer. Frozen basil butter herb cubes can elevate your burgers any time of year.
- Rehydrate dried mushrooms and combine with cooked butternut squash and lentils for a fantastic empanada filling. Green tomato salsa verde makes a great dipping sauce.
- Canned tomatoes are a fantastic base for marinara, soups and stews.



UC MASTER FOOD PRESERVER PROGRAM

The UC Master Food Preserver Program is part of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR), which connects local issues with the power of UC research. UC Cooperative Extension is a part of UC ANR. There are UC Cooperative Extension offices in 57 California counties where UC researchers, educators and volunteers work together to bring practical, science-based answers to Californians.

In addition to Sacramento, the UC Master Food Preserver Program is in the following counties: Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Humboldt, Inyo, Mono, Orange, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo and Stanislaus.

acid in pickles.” Many of the recommended recipes are from National Center for Home Food Preservation website at <http://nchfp.uga.edu>.

The program demonstrations are engaging and typically free or cost a minimal materials fee. Topics range from basic introductions to preservation such as safe dehydrating and water bath canning to mastering specific foods such as jam, soup, jerky and even foraged foods.

“We recommend taking the basic introductory classes first to get familiar with the techniques if you have never canned before, not canned in a while or even [if you] learned canning from your grandmother,” Gable said. “Things may have changed.”


Basic classes are taught monthly in Sacramento on Saturday mornings at the UC Cooperative Extension office at 4145 Branch Center Rd. Classes include Freezing Tips, Step by Step (water bath canning), The Pressure’s On (pressure canning) and All Dried Up. Classes are free and no reservations are necessary.

Monthly seasonal food demonstrations are held at the same location on Wednesday nights. In January, UC Master Food Preserver volunteers will discuss citrus preservation and take advantage of the Meyer lemons and mandarins abundant at this time of year. Come in May and you’ll learn about berries and what you can do to preserve cherries for fall

pies and winter cravings. Perhaps most important to many gardeners, in summer you can learn about preserving your abundant tomato harvest.

Free UC Agriculture and Natural Resources publications on preserving food can always be downloaded at anrcatalog.ucanr.edu.

No previous experience with preservation is required to become a certified UC Master Food Preserver volunteer. One needs only an interest in the topic and a willingness to teach to others.

During the 10-week training through the local UC Cooperative Extension office, aspiring certified UC Master Food Preserver volunteers study food safety, freezing, drying, water bath canning, pressure canning, pickled products and more before passing an exam to become certified. 

Learn more about the UC Master Food Preserver Program at mfp.ucanr.edu.

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Below: Volunteer Julia Jarvis teaches a class about canning.



PHOTO: BONNY FRANKLIN