



Take Steps to Ensure a Healthy Harvest

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With the long days of summer behind us, many individuals think of harvesting those last tomatoes and peppers before the first frost. While it can be tempting to try and harvest all fruits and vegetables that remain on the vine, it is important to take special care in choosing late season produce, especially for home canning.

Fruits and vegetables that become overripe and soft should not be used for canning, freezing or drying. Overly ripe fruits are often lower in acid (higher in pH) and canning this type of fruit may be unsafe. In addition, overly ripe fruits and vegetables will not be of high enough quality for freezing or drying. Decayed or damaged produce can also present a problem and should not be canned because these foods may also be lower in acid. While it may be safe to remove decayed or damaged areas from some foods for freezing or drying, carefully wash and inspect all foods to ensure that damaged areas are completely removed.

Tomatoes are one fruit where there is special concern regarding the quality of the fruit that is harvested. As tomatoes become overly ripe, they can become dramatically lower in acid and higher in pH. Damaged areas on tomatoes caused by bruises, cracks, blossom end rot or insects can also lower acid content. Tomatoes exposed to frost or tomatoes harvested from dead vines may also be lower in acid. Do not attempt to can or process tomatoes that are overly ripe or damaged, and do not harvest tomatoes from dead or frost-killed vines. And do not ripen green tomatoes indoors for canning, the proper acidity may not develop. Instead, harvest green tomatoes from late season or frost-damaged vines and use these green tomatoes in a relish or salsa.

Try these ideas for processing late season items from your garden:

Piccalilli

6 cups green tomatoes, chopped
1 1/2 cups sweet red peppers,
chopped
1 1/2 cups green peppers,
chopped
2 1/4 cups onion, chopped
7 1/2 cups cabbage, chopped
1/2 cup canning or pickling salt

3 tbsp whole mixed pickling salt
4 1/2 cups cider vinegar (5%
acetic acid)
3 cups brown sugar
3 tbsp mustard seed
1 tbsp celery seed

Yield: About 9 half-pints

1. Mix, chop and combine vegetables with 1/2 cup salt. Cover with hot water and let stand 12 hours.
2. Drain vegetables, squeezing out as much liquid as possible.
3. Tie spices in a spice bag, combine with vinegar and brown sugar, and heat to a boil in a saucepan.
4. Add drained vegetables and boil gently 30 minutes or until the volume of the mixture is reduced by half. Remove spice bag.

5. Sterilize jars by placing in boiling water for 10 minutes. The water should cover the jars by 1 inch.
6. Pack hot relish in sterile half-pint or pint canning jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Remove excess air from the jar by running a spatula or knife between the vegetables and the side of the jar in several places. Clean jar rims and cap with properly pretreated lids. Adjust lids.
7. **Process in a boiling water canner for 10 minutes.**

Pickled Sweet Green Tomatoes

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| 16 cups green tomatoes, sliced
(10-11 lbs) | 3 cups brown sugar |
| 2 cups onion, sliced | 1 tbsp mustard seed |
| 1/4 cup canning or pickling salt | 1 tbsp allspice |
| 4 cups cider vinegar (5% acetic acid) | 1 tbsp celery seed |
| | 1 tbsp whole cloves |

Yield: About 9 pints

1. Wash and slice tomatoes and onions. Place in bowl, sprinkle with 1/4 cup salt, and let stand 4 to 6 hours. Drain.
2. Heat and stir sugar in vinegar until dissolved. Tie mustard seed, allspice, celery seed, and cloves in a spice bag. Add to vinegar with tomatoes and onions.
3. If needed, add minimum water to cover. Bring to a boil and simmer 30 minutes, stirring as needed to prevent burning.
4. Tomatoes should be tender and transparent when properly cooked. Remove spice bag.
5. Pack hot tomatoes in clean, hot pint or quart canning jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Remove excess air from the jar by running a spatula or knife between the vegetables and the side of the jar in several places. Clean jar rims and cap with properly pretreated lids.
6. **Adjust lids and process in a boiling water canner 15 minutes for pints and 20 minutes for quarts.**

For safe home canning recipes be sure to contact your local county extension office.

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