

AUTUMN 2021 - FOOD IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Preserving and serving the produce of this golden season



You can make pickles from almost any vegetable

By Kathryn McLean

Throughout summer and into the autumn, many of us preserve fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables. Fruit jams, crisp pickles, and dried hot peppers are just a few.

Years ago, it was common for families to pack up the bounty from their gardens as the summer ended. Tomatoes were blanched, skinned and pureed for sauce; sweet peppers were roasted or grilled and packed away in jars with oil; hot peppers and fresh herbs were hung to dry.

The jarred items would be enjoyed through the winter, but they were also preserved because all sorts of fresh produce wasn't available at the grocery store throughout the year, as it is now.

These days, preserving vegetables is a chosen activity, whether for pleasure or tradition, rather than a necessity to survive the winter.

But you don't have to "put down" numerous bushels of tomatoes to take part in the tradition. You can make a tomato sauce from fresh tomatoes (blanched and skinned, then pureed and cooked to the thickness you prefer) and only prepare enough for one meal, not one winter.

You can make a simple jam with equal parts late summer berries and sugar, (cook until thick over a low heat) and keep it in a clean jar to use up over the next couple of weeks.

You can make quick pickles, from just about any vegetable you like, in a manageable amount, without boiling jars and sterilizing tongs.

When you preserve large quantities of items for use over months, you need to follow guidelines of cleaning your equipment and properly sealing everything tight so mold will not grow, and your time and food aren't wasted. If you plan to use up the pickles (or jam, sauce, etc) within a couple of weeks, you can store them in a clean jar and be fine. Throw out any leftovers when you see mold in the jar, or the smell turns.



Recipe – Quick Pickles

If you're interested in trying to preserve a few items, but don't want to invest the time, money and research for preserving jars and jars of produce, quick pickles are a good way to start.

Most vegetables can be pickled: try cauliflower, carrots, cucumber, turnip, beets, beans, celery, peppers, radish, onion, asparagus.

To make a small jar or two of pickled vegetables, choose your vegetable(s) and trim to the size of pickle you want. If you use baby carrots, green beans or snap peas, you don't need to cut them. Cauliflower can be broken into small florets, while onion, radish and beets can be sliced as thin or thick as you like. Consider cutting one vegetable two ways to see what you like better; for example, try cucumber spears as well as thick slices.

Fill a clean jar with the prepared vegetables. In a small saucepan or pot, bring 1 cup white vinegar and one teaspoon each of salt and sugar

to a boil. Stir to dissolve the salt and sugar and pour over the vegetables. Cover the jar and refrigerate at least one hour and up to two days. You just made quick pickles!

Once you taste how your pickles turn out, you may want to play around with the pickling liquid on the next batch. Grocery stores sell a pickle mix (dry herbs and seeds) in the spice aisle; consider adding a spoonful to the jar for a different taste. Skip the sugar, double the salt, include dry chili flakes, add some mustard seeds or crushed garlic cloves. In small batches, you can easily customize your pickles to your liking.

Now start incorporating pickles into your meals: quick red onion pickles for taco night, carrot spear pickles with sandwiches, mixed vegetable pickles on your charcuterie tray. If you find it's not for you, it was only a little investment, not a season's worth of produce.

Easy-to-make jam

You can make a simple jam with equal parts late summer berries and sugar, cook until thick over a low heat, and keep it in a clean jar to use up over the next couple of weeks.



Photos by Kathryn McLean

So many ways to prepare local veggies

By Kathryn McLean

As the weather starts getting cooler we start thinking about the fall harvest: apples for apple crumble and cider, pumpkins for decorations as well as pies, squash soup and assorted root vegetables like bushels of potatoes and bunches of bright carrots.

But while those are the foods we associate with Canadian autumn, there are plenty of other locally grown vegetables ready to be picked this season.

Consider cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, root vegetables, including sweet potatoes, carrots and parsnip, and the last of the tomatoes and peppers.

Vegetables are so versatile! Most can be eaten raw, so enjoy them in salads, with dips or thinly slice them and add to sandwiches.

But don't forget that vegetables can stand up to different types of cooking, too. Think about stir frying cabbage and carrots, adding sweet potatoes when you boil then mash potatoes, and grilling sweet peppers.

Instead of steaming cauliflower or broccoli, try roasting it until soft and browned.

Here's a recipe for roasted cauliflower with olives, featuring simply prepared seasonal cauliflower.

This dish can be served as a side dish as is, or mixed with a simple steamed grain like rice or quinoa, stirred into a bowl of beans or lentils, or used to top your pasta dinner with a hearty spoonful of roasted cauliflower and olives.



Recipe – Roasted Cauliflower with Olives

Ingredients

1 head of cauliflower trimmed to 1½" florets, stems included or not, as you choose

2 Tbsp olive oil (or your preferred oil)

½ cup mixed, pitted

olives, roughly chopped

1 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley

Salt and pepper

Directions

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Toss cauliflower pieces with olive oil, salt and pepper, then spread in a single layer on a baking sheet. Use two sheets if all the cauliflower cannot fit in a single layer.

Roast for 15 minutes.

Remove from the oven, add olives, mix and return to the oven. Roast 10 more minutes.

Remove from the oven and add the chopped parsley. Serve hot or at room temperature.

