

Making Your Harvest Last

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Vegetable gardeners learn very soon with garden fresh produce, it's feast or famine. Months go by with nothing to show for your work and then, bam, you're up to your ears in tomatoes and peppers and beans. Unfortunately, they never last long enough and then you're looking longingly at the garden hoping for more fresh veggies. All this inconsistency leads most gardeners to find a way to prolong the harvest and that's where canning, freezing and drying come in.

Freezing is probably the easiest since it requires few specialized tools. All you need is a large pot, a large bowl, a slotted spoon, some freezer bags or containers and a freezer. Since most vegetables contain enzymes that will cause them to lose flavor and discolor over time, it's a good idea to blanch any vegetables you plan on freezing. A few minutes in boiling water followed by a quick dip in ice cold water is all the prep work needed before putting them in your containers and popping them into the freezer.

Canning requires more work and specialized tools but it produces interesting jams and jellies and in some cases, your produce will store longer. The product produced by canning is usually more finished and most of the time it just needs to be opened and served. There's nothing like a good pickle in late December to remind gardeners of the cucumber vines they grew in summer.

Drying is probably the oldest form of food preservation. Removing water from vegetables not only preserved them but made them easier to carry as our ancestors roamed the continents. This form of preserving is great for fruits. Dried figs remind you of summer and dried apples of fall. If you camp, you can make your own dried food and skip the preservatives. Dried zucchini and carrots are great to add to soup in winter. And don't forget about drying your own herbs. All you need is a good dehydrator and you're on your way.

For more info on these food preservation techniques visit the following websites:

http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/how/can_home.html

<http://www.freshpreserving.com/home.aspx>

<http://www.pickyourown.org/allaboutcanning.htm>

<http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-146-W.pdf>