
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 146 Canning Q&A With Theresa Loe

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I have grown this food. It's incredibly flavorful because it is fresh from my own backyard or from my farmer's market or my local farmer. And I want to capture that and save it for later in the best way possible. Both from a nutrition standpoint and from a flavor standpoint.

This is the living home grown podcast episode 146. Welcome to the living homegrown podcast where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle, is your host national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

Hey there everybody. Welcome to the podcast. I'm your host Theresa Loe and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without a farm which includes organic small space food growing canning and fermenting the harvest and artisan food crafts like baking your own bread. It's all about the different ways that we can live closer to our food and take small delicious steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you would like to learn more about any of these topics or my online courses my coaching or my living homegrown Institute which is my membership site then just visit my website Living homegrown dot com. Today's episode is a Q and A episode. I'm going solo on this one. I have not done a Q in an episode in quite a while.

We have been batching on the podcast for the last few months which means that I set aside maybe two days and I just record maybe six or seven podcasts with different people that I interview over those two days and then we have them all setup to go out over the next six or seven weeks and it really works great for me because then I'm not trying to you know scramble to put together a podcast. At the last minute. But the downside is that because I've been concentrating so much with my team on scheduling people out for those days I kind of neglected doing solo episodes and I had a few people write to me and asking when are you going to do another solo episode. I've had several people write in with questions and then finally my team said you know you haven't done a solo in like a couple months. So I decided now is the time I'm doing a solo episode today. And I went through kind of the bucket list of all the questions that my team been collecting for a while and I picked out a few that all have to do with the same topic and that topic is canning right. When this comes out it will be the May going into June timeframe and that means that a lot of you are gearing up your gardens and you're starting to think about harvesting and you're starting to think about canning. So I thought this would be a good time to dive into that topic. We haven't covered Canning in a long time now. Those of you who have been a longtime follower of the Living homegrown podcast you know that I used to cover canning preserving a lot and then we have slowly branched into really all

aspects of living a farm fresh lifestyle. But those of you who are newer to my podcast you may not know my background in Canning.

So here's the scoop. I grew up canning and preserving. I grew up in Los Angeles but with a family who loved to grow their own food. So we did a lot of canning and preserving growing up just because my my parents love to do that but we always approached it from as an art form you know culinary arts as an art form. And I later was trained as a master food preserver and I went through culinary school but I also have a B.S. degree in engineering. My family is a family of engineers. I grew up around engineering and I went on to get a degree in engineering although obviously that is not where I took my whole life path. I only worked as an engineer for I don't know maybe eight or 10 years as an aerospace engineer and then I went into gardening and food and television and completely shifted away from the engineering field. However when I look at canning and preserving and when I have taught canning and preserving or with my canning Academy or any of my living home grown institute courses I always love to approach things where I am teaching. The reasons behind the techniques and that's because I get really kind of geek out on the science behind some of the reasons that we have the rules for safety. And I also because I went through culinary school. I approach canning and all types of preserving from a foodie standpoint. To me it's all about capturing that seasonal flavor in the jar or that seasonal flavor in whatever preservation method we're were using. I have grown this food.

It's incredibly flavorful because it is fresh from my own backyard or from my farmer's market or my local farmer and I want to capture that and save it for later in. The best way possible. Both from a nutrition standpoint and from a flavor standpoint. So whenever you hear me talking about canning and preserving that's where I'm coming from. Also I do homestead on one tenth of an acre in Los Angeles. We grow some of our own food. I also shop local farmers markets. We have backyard chickens and my family has property up in Northern California we have 14 acres of an heirloom farmstead that we are in the process of restoring. So we have a lot of heirloom fruit trees up there that I'm in charge of restoring back to their former glory. And so I have a lot of experience with canning and preserving both at the farmstead and with my own small plot here in Los Angeles. So when I talk about canning that's where I'm coming from. I absolutely adore the subject and I love to share it with everybody else. So that's what's in it for today. And before we dive into the episode I wanted to tell you that today's episode is brought to you by living home grown Institute which is my monthly membership site where you can access an entire library of monthly masterclasses that help you live a farm fresh lifestyle. Now I believe that living an organic farm fresh lifestyle is really a journey in learning and just as we have different skills such as food fermentation and food growing and even critter keeping. There are three distinct stages of growth.

We start out with just being curious and then we go into experimentation and eventually we grow into mastery of these different skills. Now if you are looking at creating a farm fresh lifestyle for yourself and you're curious where you may fall on the growth scale of

the different skills. I've got a great free resource for you. It's my farm fresh success path and it's what my students use inside my learning institute and it will help you decide where you are on your own journey. The characteristics of that particular stage and some action steps and information to help you go to the next level to get to the success path. PDAF. You can just go to living homegrown dot com slash path and I will have everything there for you to download for free. All right so let's dive into today's Q and A's. The first question is from chastity and she wrote I have been told by other organic gardeners that Canning is the worst possible way to preserve your food. Because during the canning process of reaching such high temperatures almost 90 percent of the good enzymes and nutrients are destroyed. They say that besides just eating raw or very lightly stir fried food that it's better to dehydrate than it is to can. I'm really confused because I'm new to all of this and I'm just coming into converting myself and my family into an organic homegrown homesteading lifestyle. Please help and thank you so much. I absolutely love your podcast.

While chastity I'm so glad you asked this question it is really a fantastic question because knowing what is most important to you when you are preserving the food will really determine which is the best method and what you plan to do with that preserved food when you go to use it or cook it. So let's talk about that. First of all yes it is true that enzymes are killed during canning. Now how much they are killed or if all of them are killed depends upon what method you are using for canning such as pressure canning vs water bath pressure canning goes up to a much higher temperature. And yes the higher temperatures can disable many if not most of the enzymes and yes those same enzymes can survive when dehydrated. So if enzymes are your ultimate goal then Canning is not the process to use for preserving your food. Instead you would want to go for things like fermentation. That would be my first choice then dehydration or freezing which does kill some but not all of the enzymes so you might be thinking well wait a minute how does freezing kill some of the enzymes. Well when you are freezing vegetables you are supposed to blanch the vegetables very quickly and the purpose of that is to kill the enzymes that cause the food to soften or continue to break down while they are in the freezer. So even though you're freezing. The point is to kill some of those enzymes before you freeze. So I just want to make sure that you understand that with food preservation we are slowing down the process of that food breaking down and decomposing. We're just slowing it down. We're not stopping it completely.

So when you are trying to decide between different food preservation methods you have to look at a couple different things such as What are you going to do with that food when you go to consume it. Most people like to cook their food when it comes to things like tomato sauce and does with tomatoes. Most of the people who are canning tomatoes will be cooking those tomatoes when they go to use them. So since cooking will kill the enzymes anyway then it doesn't really matter if you can at first. Also most people would rather use canned tomatoes rather than dehydrated tomatoes for their recipes. So in that case canning might be the way to go. Now in the case of pickles if you wanted to do pickling for your vegetables let's say pickling is much more nutritious. If you do real

fermentation versus a quick pickle that is when you are using vinegar to do the pickling process. So real fermentation is when you are allowing the bacteria to ferment in the jar and turn that vegetable into a pickle into a high acid product. The downside of a fermented pickle is that it won't sit on the shelf as long as a canned pickle with vinegar without changing flavor and texture. And that is because it will continue to change and evolve because the fermentation process is still happening even if you put it in the refrigerator that ferment it pickle will slowly ever so slowly continue to change in flavor and texture. So if long term storage is what you're after then canning would be the way to go. In that case as well with long term storage you are for fitting the beneficial bacteria in order to have the food on the shelf longer.

Like if you wanted to prep for emergencies or you wanted to have those tomatoes or that vegetable on the shelf for a really long period of time and in the case of something like jams or jellies well a dehydrated jam is probably not that practical. So you probably would not dehydrate something as a jam unless you were gonna make like fruit leather with it. That would be different than jam so most the time when people are making jam it's not for nutritional reasons. And yes you can make jam with low sugar and no sugar I'm going to talk about that in another question here on this episode. But in most cases people are making jam more as a treat for something that they would spread on toast. And in that case Canning is usually the way to go. So what I'm trying to say here is that we have different foods that we're wanting to eat at different levels of preservation for and store them for different lengths of time and a mix is probably ultimately what you want. So if you want enzymes and vitamins and minerals then eat fruits and vegetables either fresh or raw with no cooking. That is absolutely the best way to get the nutrition. The next one down from that in terms of nutrition would be to either ferment or freeze or dehydrate but for long term storage or for things that are going to be cooked anyway or for something like jam that is just a treat and you're not going for nutrition then you could look to canning as your way of preserving the food.

So in other words there are different choices of food preservation based on what is the most priority for you with that food whether it's nutrition enzymes or long term storage. So I hope that answered your question. I thought it was an excellent question. The next question is from Sherry and she says I have an apricot tree where all the fruit comes on at once. I want to make apricot jam as Christmas gifts this summer and I want to do it in large batches. However all the jam recipes say I can't double the recipe. Why is that. OK so yes Sherry when you are looking at any jam or jelly recipe it will tell you that you should not double the recipe. And that's because all jam recipes are there like developed to cook the jam within a certain amount of time. If you double the recipe you're going to double the cooking time and that can be a really big problem. This is because with larger or longer cooking times you affect the water content more water is burned off when you cook over a longer period of time. And this can affect the flavor of the jam as well as cause some other problems. Basically you end up over cooking the jam and when you overcook jam it becomes really hard and and spreadable in texture it turns into more like a gummy bear. Then it is a jelly if that makes sense. So first I should say that if that ever

happens to you if you ever overcook a jam you can still use it. If the flavor is good so if you taste it in the flavors. Awesome but it's more like a gummy bear and you can't spread it on your toast.

Don't throw it away because you can still use that hardened jam for sauces and Blaze's you can melt some in a pan with a little bit of water and pour it over a turkey or a chicken. You can make a finishing sauce to go over steaks and oh it's just so many wonderful things you can do with that. And if it's really solid like it is a solid gummy bear type texture then you can slice it and serve it with cheese and crackers. I swear this is incredible. So don't throw it away if we ever overcook it. As long as the flavor is still good but if you do double a recipe and you get that longer cooking time. So not only do you end up overcooking it because too much water gets evaporated off. But also it affects the pectin in the pectin gets overcooked and you usually end up burning the jam before it gels. So part of this is because when you are cooking the jam you are reaching a certain temperature with the jam and when you double it it takes twice as long to bring that entire pot up to the temperature that causes the gel. And if you're ever doing something like cherries for example cherries burn really easily. So if you double the recipe you're pretty much guaranteed you're going to burn that jam rather than ending up with anything that gels or isn't burnt. So I do not recommend that you double the recipe. So what should you do if you want to make a lot of jam at once. Well the safest thing honestly is that you make multiple recipes instead of doubling.

So you set aside an afternoon and you prep for several recipes at once and you do them in succession one at a time. That is absolutely the safest way to do it where you won't overcook the jam and you should get a good gel and a good flavor at the end. Now some will argue well what about commercial kitchens. They are making large batches so it has to be possible right. Oh yes it's absolutely possible. It does take a little bit of trial and error and you really need to use like a commercial sized pan that has a heavy bottom and you bring it up to a really high heat so that you are cooking the jam in the same amount of time as you would if it was a single batch. So yes it's possible but it's tricky and unless you kind of know what you're doing you end up overcooking the jam or burning it. So what I recommend for the best success is just to do the single batches one at a time but you can do them in six sessions set aside an afternoon or have someone help you and you are each doing a batch of jam at the same time. I've done that before with my mom where we were each on a pot and were making a double batch by each of us making a batch at the same time. So that is possible as well. So I don't want to discourage you.

I think you could definitely like spend an afternoon and make several batches and if you want to try doing a double batch just know that you might end up with a different texture so tested out before you really go to town and do multiple double batches. Now I'm sure that's not the answer that you wanted but definitely if you want the best success that's what I would recommend. OK. The next question is from Maya and she says I have some jam that is over a year old. Is it still good. OK well first of all Maya you didn't specify what type of jam it was. How much over a year it is if it looks good on the shelf if it

you've verified it's still sealed so it's hard for me to answer that question without actually seen it myself. But let me talk to you about some guidelines on how you can tell if a jam is good or not. I should probably start by saying that the USDA guidelines for canning recommends that a jam is good for a year on the shelf. Now our jam is able to be longer than a year. Absolutely. Now here's the thing. There are really two things to consider when you are looking at a jam and wondering if it's good to eat. The first is safety of course and the second is quality. So let's talk about safety first. As long as the seal is good and you see no signs of spoilage a jar of jam does last longer than a year. So I would be ok with a Jam up to two years old on my shelf if I know the seal is good. And I can verify that there are no signs of spoilage.

But what you usually end up with is a jam that before you hit that two year mark you end up throwing it away because of quality not because of safety. So let's talk about quality for a second. Now when I'm talking here I'm talking about a standard high sugar jam. I'm talking about a recipe that uses a lot of sugar to get that pectin acid sugar ratio to get a gel. So your standard typical jam that you would find on the back of a box of pectin is what I'm going to talk about first and then I'll talk about the low and no sugar pectins. OK. So when we're talking about a jam that has a lot of sugar in there the sugar is there to create this chemical reaction that causes the gel but that sugar is also a very powerful preservative and the quality might last well past a year in terms of flavor and color because of that high sugar content. What usually goes first with that type of jam is the texture. After about a year to 18 months the texture can start to get a little funky on you it starts to get a little runny it kind of weeps and sometimes it even gets a little grainy. So when you're looking at quality we're looking at flavor color and texture and with high sugar jams. After I've inspected that the seal is good and there's no signs of spoilage. The next thing I look at is the texture and if the texture is still good the flavor and color are usually good as well with a high sugar jam and that's because the sugar has been acting as a preservative.

Now let's talk about low and no sugar jams because it's kind of a different situation in those jams. The gel is created if you're using a box of low or no sugar packed in the gel is created not from sugar but from a pectin calcium ratio. There's calcium in that box of pectin and that's what causes it to gel or you may make more of a fruit spread that's more natural where you add no added Pectin and that's where you're just using the natural sugar and packed in in the fruit with maybe some lemon to get a little acid and you have this balance where you get a gel with temperature. Now in both of those cases the only sugar that is in there is the natural sugar in the fruit. So you don't have the high sugar giving you the preservative aspect that you do in a regular jam. So the benefit of a low or no sugar jam is that there's no sugar that's added to that. So it's more natural and it's a little bit healthier than a typical jam with high sugar. The downside is that because it's lower in sugar you don't have that extra preservative in there that can give it a longer shelf life. And that means that low and no sugar jams tend to kind of go downhill faster on the shelf. Now in terms of safety a low or no sugar jam basically is the same you want to

make sure that it's sealed that there's no signs of spoilage and it should stay sealed on the jar just fine for a year to two years. That's usually not where the problem is.

The problem is usually that by one year a low or no sugar jam tends to have really poor quality. Everything starts to go with a low and no sugar jams the flavor and texture and color go and of the three things the color goes first. So within just a month or two of canning it the color starts to turn brown and kind of go downhill which is fine that's just you know aesthetics it doesn't affect the flavor. The second thing to go is the texture it will start to get runny may be a little grainy it'll get lumpy. So the texture is next and then the third thing is yes the flavor will start to deteriorate as it sets on the shelf. So with low or no sugar jams they tend to start to go after six months. And by a year only occasionally have I had a jam really last past a year when it's a low or no sugar jam it might make it to 18 months but it rarely goes past that. So where I might eat a high sugar jam after 18 months I rarely have a low or no sugar jam that would make it that long. But the bottom line is you have to look at each jar of jam as an individual case and you want to check the safety of the jar making sure that it's still sealed. It hasn't been leaking. There's no signs of spoilage. And you want to look at the quality of flavor texture and color before you consume that jar. So hopefully that gives you some guidelines as to if your jar is still ok after a year. You have to look at it case by case. OK.

Well those were really good questions and if you have any canning questions would love to hear from you. You can submit your questions on our Web site at livinghomegrown.com go to our contact page and send me any questions that you would like me to cover here on the podcast. And as always in the show notes for today's episode I have lots more information about canning and preserving. Just go to livinghomegrown.com/146 and I'll have everything there for you. Today's podcast episode was brought to you by my monthly membership site. Living Home Grown Institute where you can have access to an entire library of monthly masterclasses to help you live a farm fresh lifestyle if you'd like to get the free PTF success path that my students use inside my membership. Then just go to livinghomegrown.com/path and I'll have everything there for you for free. That's it for today's episode. I hope this information helped you get geared up for canning season which is just around the corner so until next time. Just try to live a little more local seasonal and homegrown. Take care. That's all for this episode of The Living homegrown podcast visit livinghomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the living homegrown podcast.