

Preserving the Bounty of the Season

By Kathy Fitzpatrick

There's no doubt about it fall is here. I've just come in from my backyard garden with a arm load of wonderfully fresh produce. Neon lights swiss chard, kale, collards, fat yellow turnips, an abundance of tomatoes, green, red and yellow peppers, jalapeños and habenaro's and the last of the beans. Later i'll pick lamb's quarter, spicy nasturtium leaves and flowers, chives, salad burnett, mesculin lettuce and a few dandelion leaves for a salad.

If you've ever considered trying your hand at home preservation, fall, with it's generous bounty, is a wonderful time to begin. Home preservation can be as easy or as complicated as you'd like. The following recipes are designed for those with limited time and energy, no fancy equipment required. Although simple, they're not only delicious, but rich with vitamins and minerals. So grab some jars and get ready for a well stocked pantry.

How to make Balsamic Vinegar

The best way to make this is to go to the woods and while enjoying the beauty and serenity gather up pine needles. Some people have a preference for a specific kind of needles but, as an equal opportunity fall preservationist, i'll use any i can get my fall saving hands on! In my own backyard there's cedar, blue spruce and a couple other evergreens whose names escape me. Each one has a uniquely wonderful aromic taste. Delicious drizzled on salads, in soups or just to sniff when the urge comes. As a Balsamic Vinegar affectionato i can attest to the richness of flavor, better than any store bought variety, regardless of the price tag. What's better is the complete ease in making them. I made my first bottle last year using white pine needles and and all winter long found myself making excuses to go to the kitchen just to open up the jar and delight in it's healing aroma.

Pine is a wonderful source of Vitamin C, it contains more C than oranges. The apple cider vinegar leeches the vitamins and minerals out of the needles and into the vinegar making it a rich source of vitamins and minerals.

To make your own "balsamic" vinegar simply fill a clean jar with any kind of pine needle and cover with apple cider vinegar. Put a lid on and let steep for 4-6 weeks, strain [or not] and enjoy! It doesn't get any easier than this! [if using a metal lid place wax paper between the top of the jar and the metal lid]

Homemade Sauerkraut

This is the way my grandma made sauerkraut when my mom was growing up. Their cellar shelves were lined with row after row of this simple method of saving fall in a jar. Nothing beats homemade!

1 cabbage, cored and chopped [or shredded]
1teaspoon sea salt
1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
Good water

Fill a quart jar with chopped or shredded cabbage, to each jar add 1 teaspoon of sea salt and 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar. [or white vinegar] Cover with good water and put the ring and lid on tight. [make sure it's tight!!!] Store in a cool place for 2 months and enjoy!

Latin American Kraut or Cortido

This is a spicy probiotic condiment that goes well with Latin American and Mexican foods....and it's also great dumped on top of organic salad greens! Delicious!

1 large cabbage, cored and chopped
1 cup of grated carrots
2 medium onions, thinly sliced
1 TBSLP dried oregano
1/4-1/2 tsp dried pepper flakes
1 TBSLP sea salt
1 TBSLP whey or if not available use and additional 1 TBSLP of sea salt

In a large bowl mix all ingredients together, including whey and sea salt. Pound with a wooden hammer for about 10 minutes to release the juices. [i just let it sit for a several hours] Place in a 2 quart mason jar and press down firmly with a wooden hammer until the juices come to the top of the jar. The top of the cabbage mixture should be covered with at least below the top of the jar. Cover tightly and let set out for 3 days before placing in cold storage.

Cortido is traditionally made with pineapple vinegar, something i look forward to trying! Like traditional sauerkraut this improves with age! Enjoy!

Ratatouille

As i write i'm enjoying the scent of Ratatouille wafting up from the crock pot in the kitchen. This year, our CSA farm share has provided us with a bounty of eggplant in all shapes, sizes and colors. While eggplant can be blanched and frozen it really loses a bit of it's appeal. So i preserve it by making up batch after batch of Ratatouille to freeze and use in the winter. Freezing isn't the best way to preserve food but when using the freshest organic ingredients it's far better than buying food that's been shipped in during the winter months. This is a very rich dish, usually cooked slowly on the stove after the vegetables have been sautéed. I have found i get the same rich taste by cooking it in a crock pot without all the work. I don't measure choosing instead to chop up the vegetables until it looks right. But i'll try to quesstimate for those who need them.

1 large eggplant [don't peel] cut in large cubes
2 green peppers, cut into strips
2 onions
4 cloves of garlic
4 tomatoes, cut in pieces
4 tablespoons of oil [olive, sunflower, sesame]
1 small jar of organic tomato paste

Add to taste
salt
pepper

Optional
bragg's liquid amino's
basil
rosemary
thyme
marjoram
nutritional yeast

Place the chopped eggplant, green peppers, onions, garlic and tomatoes, along with the oil, into a crock-pot and cook overnight on low heat. In the morning add the tomato paste and a bit of filtered water. Continue to cook until the veggies are mushy or have the texture you prefer. Then season to taste with salt and pepper along with any of the following, basil, rosemary, thyme or marjoram. Sprinkle with bragg's liquid amino's and nutritional yeast. Serve over steamed millet, brown rice or lentils. Freeze leftovers to enjoy later.