

Preserve It Fresh, Preserve It Safe

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Preserving Elderberry Products

Interest in elderberry products seems to be increasing. Elderberries contain naturally occurring antioxidants, vitamin C and phenolic compounds. Both the fruit and the flowers are used for wine, juice, jelly, syrup, colorants and in dietary supplements and other products.

There are currently two research-tested recipes for canning elderberry products for personal use, for whole elderberries and elderberry jelly.

Whole elderberries. Elderberries may be canned following the instructions for canning whole berries. Choose ripe berries with uniform color. Wash 1 or 2 quarts of berries at a time. Drain and stem, if necessary. Prepare and boil preferred syrup, if desired.* Add ½ cup syrup, juice or water to each clean jar. Elderberries can use the hot- or raw-pack method. For hot pack, heat berries in boiling water for 30 seconds and drain. Fill jars and cover with hot juice, leaving ½ inch of headspace. For raw pack, fill jars with raw berries, shaking down gently while filling. Cover with hot syrup and juice or water, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Adjust lids and process. In a boiling water canner, hot-packed pint or quart jars should be processed for 15 minutes (0–1,000 feet altitude) or 20 minutes for processing at 1,001–3,000 feet. Raw-packed pints should be processed for 15 minutes at lower altitudes, or for 20 minutes at 1,001–3,000 feet. Raw-packed quarts should be processed for 20 minutes at lower altitudes and 25 minutes at 1,001–3,000 feet. Recommended pressure canning processing times also are available from https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/berries_whole.html.

If you are interested in preserving elderberry juice, syrup or any elderberry product other than whole berries or elderberry jelly, we recommend that you freeze the product instead to ensure it's safely preserved. No research-tested recipes exist for canning those other products.

Note that if you are interested in canning elderberry products to sell, you need to follow the regulatory requirements for that specific product—which likely includes having a laboratory analyze the product and having a “process authority” evaluate the recipe for safety.

**More information on making syrups for canning fruit is available from https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/syrups.html.*

Sources:

University of Rochester Medical Center. Health encyclopedia: Elderberry. www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?contentTypeid=19&contentid=Elderberry.

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National Center for Home Food Preservation. 2018. Selecting, preparing and canning fruit: Berries — whole. Last reviewed February. https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_02/berries_whole.html

National Center for Home Food Preservation. 2017. Making jams and jellies: Making jams and jellies with added pectin. Last reviewed March. https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_07/jam_jelly_with_pectin.html.

Elderberry Jelly

Follow the instructions for making elderberry jelly on a package of pectin that you've purchased. Be sure to use Mason canning jars and self-sealing two-piece lids, and process the jars in a boiling-water bath canner (hot pack, half-pint or pint jars) for 5 minutes (10 minutes for 1,001–6,000-foot elevations).



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In a Vacuum

You can use many types of packaging to freeze food. Examples include canning jars, plastic freezer bags, freezer paper and other types of plastic freezer containers. Home vacuum-packaging machines, or vacuum sealers, are also popular for freezing food. They are useful for extending the storage time of refrigerated foods, dried foods and frozen foods. But there are some precautions to keep in mind.

1. Vacuum packaging does not substitute for the heat processing of home-canned foods.
2. Vacuum packaging does not allow perishable foods, normally refrigerated or frozen, to be stored at room temperature.
3. Thaw frozen vacuum-packaged food in the refrigerator, under cold running water or as part of the cooking process.
4. Removing oxygen can reduce the growth of some types of bacteria, but allow others to grow faster if the food is not stored properly.

So keep in mind that removing oxygen from a food's environment does not just solve some food storage problems — it could also cause others. You still need to use safe food handling practices, such as washing your hands, avoiding cross-contamination and storing perishable foods in the refrigerator or freezer.

Learn more at https://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/vacuum_packaging.html.

Use Your Green Tomatoes

The chill in the air has you looking at the tomato plants and all of that green fruit hanging from them, wondering if they'll have enough time to ripen. When a frost is in the forecast, head out and harvest those green tomatoes.

Selection and picking tips:

- Pick ripe, nearly ripe and mature green fruits before a frost occurs. Mature green tomatoes are those with a glossy, whitish-green fruit color and of mature size.
- Select fruits only from strong healthy vines, and pick only those fruits free of disease, insect or mechanical damage.
- Remove stems to prevent them from puncturing each other.
- If dirty, gently wash and allow the fruit to air dry.

Storage tips:

- Store tomatoes one to two layers deep in boxes, or in plastic bags with a few holes for air circulation.
- If you have a cool, moderately humid room, simply place them on a shelf.
- Keep tomatoes out of direct sunlight.
- As tomatoes ripen, they naturally release ethylene gas, which stimulates ripening. To slow ripening, sort out ripened fruits from green tomatoes each week. To speed up ripening, place green or partially ripe fruits in a bag or box with a ripe tomato.
- Green, mature tomatoes stored at 65–70 degrees F will ripen in about two weeks. Cooler temperatures slow the ripening process. At 55 degrees F tomatoes will slowly ripen, and be of inferior quality. Likewise, if tomatoes are stored where the humidity is too high, the fruit can mold and rot. If the humidity is too low, the fruit may shrivel and dry out. Since homes vary in humidity levels, you will need to learn by trial and error what works best for you. Unfortunately, tomatoes ripened indoors are not as flavorful as vine-ripened fruits. However, compared to store-bought tomatoes, you will be delighted with your own home-ripened tomatoes.

If you are interested in recipes using green tomatoes, use http://cespubs.uaf.edu/index.php/download_file/1255/ to download the publication "A Harvest of Green Tomatoes" from the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service.

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