

Jam, jelly not difficult for sugar precise cooks

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"You have to stir constantly and test it so you know it gets to the boiling point. You don't answer the phone or run next door."

Reducing sugar will yield fewer jars of jelly. Lemon juice will bring out the flavor and help preserve the bright color. Thieleke recommends adding one tablespoon lemon juice to each 1 1/4 quarts of strawberries.

Cut pieces of Granny Smith apples, added while the jelly is cooking, will produce a firmer consistency. The apple, which contains pectin, should be tied in a piece of cheesecloth, "or you will have applesauce," Thieleke said.

Thieleke draws on personal experience and 11 years of service with the cooperative extension service. She was hired to teach food safety after doctors of people contracted food poisoning at a popular Oakland County Mexican restaurant. The culprit was improperly home-canned sauce ingredients.

With the advent of the growing season, Thieleke will be available to speak at garden clubs and

farmers' markets in Oakland County.

Both the Wayne County and Oakland County cooperative extension services have people on staff to answer questions about procedures and food safety. In Wayne County, call 721-6550. In Oakland County, call 858-0897. Hours are 8:30-5 p.m. weekdays.

According to Thieleke, most problems with home-preserved jelly occur when cooks try to double the recipe. The delicate balance between ingredients, cooking times, etc., becomes upset. The mixture fails to gel properly.

"The minute you start doubling, you will have trouble," Thieleke said.

Thieleke cans jams and jellies, including her favorite strawberry-rhubarb and peach flavors. When her four sons were growing up, the jellies didn't last long. Now, Thieleke gives many of her jellies away as gifts. Despite her expertise, Thieleke recalls a few flops, including a tomato conserve with lemon, which bombed.

She tells callers, distraught because the jelly is runny, to call it ice cream topping or pancake syrup. Chances are, it will taste just fine.

Picking is worth effort

By Arlene Funke
staff writer

Picking your own strawberries can be hard work, but the rewards are fresh and plentiful.

Michigan's strawberry season is a scant monthlong. Depending on the weather, the berries are ripe in early June. Most are gone by July 4th, according to growers.

Western Wayne County has a high concentration of strawberry farms. Michigan-style is U-pick, which means customers provide the labor. Many farms are small, family-run operations, which advertise by word-of-mouth. Customers can follow posted signs.

"We plant early varieties," said Doris Rowe of Rowe's Produce Farm, a 35-acre spread in Belleville, an area known for its predominance in U-pick strawberry farms. "They look real nice."

THIS YEAR'S Belleville Strawberry Festival, which salutes the popular berry, will be June 17-19.

Rowe attributes the area's successful strawberry production to high ground and sandy soil. Growth has been slowed somewhat this season by dry weather and nighttime temperatures in the 40s, she said.

"Wear old clothes and come and enjoy yourself," Rowe said. "We have brochures and supervision in the field for people who haven't picked before. You can drive right to the field."

The Rowe farm, which later will sell sweet corn, tomatoes, beans, melons and fresh peas, sells its strawberries by the pound (one pound equals 1 1/4 quarts of berries). Customers who buy \$25 or more of berries receive a free 64-page

strawberry cookbook.

Following are some tips and suggestions from farmers. Also included is a partial list of U-pick strawberry farms, culled from "Michigan Country Carousel," a publication available from county cooperative extension services.

- Call ahead before driving out to a U-pick farm. Growers can give hours of operation and picking conditions.

- Confirm prices and if containers are provided. Many growers sell by the quart (1 1/4 pounds). A price of 75 cents per quart would average out to 50 cents per pound.

- Pick in the morning, when weather is cooler. Wear protective shoes and hat to shield skin from the hot sun. Old clothes, preferably long sleeves and long pants, will protect against insects.

- Children must be supervised. Always check to see what ages are permitted.

- Pick only red berries. Berries with white tips are immature and won't ripen after they're picked.

- Don't squeeze berries, as that

will damage the fruit. Leave cap or stem connected.

- Protect berries from direct sunlight. Refrigerate berries and don't wash until time of use. Remove stem after berry is washed so water doesn't seep into the center of the berry.

Wayne County:
Blessed's Fruit Farm, 49601 Powell Road, two miles west of Plymouth. Phone: 453-6439.

Thornhill Berry Farm, 16280 Martinsville Road, Belleville. Phone: 699-9080.

Sage's Red Barn Market, on Ecorse Road, one mile west of Haggerty, Belleville. Phone: 397-2763.

Oakland County:
Meyer Berry Farm, 48080 W. Eight Mile Road, Northville. Phone: 349-0289.

Middleton Berry Farm, 2120 Stony Creek Road, Lake Orion. Phone: 693-6018 or 693-6124.

Special's Strawberries, 1220 Stony Creek Road, Lake Orion, six miles north of Rochester. Phone: 693-8434. The Strawberry Patch, 2375 Wilcox Road, one mile east of Milford. Phone: 685-1353.

Have a berry jamboree

Celebrate Michigan's bountiful strawberry harvest with these jam and jelly recipes.

SUGAR FREE FREEZER JAM

2 lb. lemon juice
2 lb. water
1 envelope unflavored gelatin
1 1/2 tsp. cornstarch
2 cups sliced strawberries
1 tsp. cinnamon or nutmeg

Combine lemon juice, water, gelatin and cornstarch in a saucepan. Heat, stirring constantly until gelatin and cornstarch are dissolved. Add sliced (or chopped) berries and cinnamon or nutmeg. Heat to boiling over medium heat, stirring constantly. Boil three minutes. Remove from heat. Pour into hot jars and cover. Let stand until cool. Store in refrigerator. Use within one to two weeks. (Recipe courtesy Cooperative Extension Service)

MICROWAVE STRAWBERRY JAM

4 cups strawberries, crushed
1 lb. lemon juice
1/4 cup powdered pectin
3 cups sugar

Combine strawberries, lemon juice and pectin in a 3-quart microwave safe bowl. Cover with plastic wrap or waxed paper and bring to a boil in microwave oven on high setting (about 7 minutes). Remove from oven and stir. Cover and cook 3 minutes in microwave oven and add remaining ingredients. Return uncovered mixture to oven and cook until jam sheets from spoon (about 1 minute). Skim foam. Pour into hot jars, leaving 1/4 inch head space. Adjust caps. Process 10 minutes in a boiling water bath. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PROCESS IN MICROWAVE OVEN. Yield — 4 eight-ounce jars. NOTE: Microwave ovens don't replace processing jars and spreads in a boiling water bath. They are used to shorten preparation time. (Recipe from Ball Blue Book)

LOW-SUGAR STRAWBERRY FRUIT SPREAD

1 envelope unflavored gelatin
1/4 cup water
3 cups sliced fresh strawberries
3 lb. sugar
2 lb. water
1 1/2 lb. lemon juice

Soften gelatin in 1/4 cup water. Set aside. Combine remaining ingredients in medium saucepan. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered 8 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and add gelatin mixture, stirring until gelatin is dissolved. Cool to room temperature.

Calling all salad makers

They're coming in — from the Kitchens of Redford Township to Bloomfield Hills and several communities in between. Cooks are sharing their favorite recipe or in some cases, several favorite yet distinctly different recipes, for potato salad.

The season of picnics and outdoor barbecues is here — at long last. And we asked our readers last week to share a favorite potato salad recipe.

From now through September, picnic baskets and picnic tables brimming with summer foods will include that old-time summer favorite.

If you have a favorite potato salad recipe, we'd still like to hear from you. Whether mixed with mayonnaise or a homemade special dressing, chock full of crunchy vegetables or basically potato, laden with special herbs or other ingredients, let us know what gives your salad its special zing.

Send your recipe by Friday, June 10, to: Taste, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 88551 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. After selecting the most interesting possibilities, we'll test them and taste them.

Our taste-off crew will vote for the ones they like best. The winning recipes will be published in Taste with prizes for first and second place.

Pour strawberry mixture into sterilized glass jars. Cover tightly. Refrigerate at least 4-6 hours or until mixture is thoroughly chilled. Store in refrigerator up to 1 month. Yield — 3 half pints (about 7 calories per Tbsp.). (Recipe courtesy of Belleville Area Chamber of Commerce)

SPRING JAM

3 cups shredded fresh pineapple
2 cups cut fresh rhubarb
4 cups hulled washed strawberries
dash of salt
4 1/4 cups sugar

Put pineapple in large preserving kettle and cook without added liquid 10 minutes. Add rhubarb, berries and salt. Cook 20 minutes. Add sugar, bring to boil and boil rapidly, stirring frequently, 25 to 30 minutes or until thick. Skim off foam and pour into hot, sterilized jars. Seal with hot paraffin wax with lids and store in cool place. Yield — 6 half-pint jars. (Recipe courtesy of Belleville Area Chamber of Commerce)

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