

News Column for Week of June 1, 2020

Kathy S. McEwan  
Southwind Extension District  
Family and Consumer Sciences

### **Food safety expert shares food preservation tips for summer produce**

Forgive Karen Blakeslee if she happens to tell you to mind your peas and carrots these days. She certainly means well.

That's because the Kansas State University food safety specialist knows it's nearly that time of year when many of the state's gardeners are getting ready to bring in their first haul of the popular garden veggies.

Her advice: "Plan ahead!" "Decide now how you want to preserve your produce and how much storage space is available," said Blakeslee, who also is coordinator of the university's Rapid Response Center for food safety.

K-State Research and Extension has several publications available online to help home food preservation enthusiasts safely preserve garden vegetables, including a How-to Guide to Pressure Canning [and](#) How-to Guide to Water Bath Canning and Steam Canning.

"Preserve all produce as soon as possible after harvest for best quality, ideally the same day or next day," Blakeslee said. "When canning peas or carrots, which are low acid vegetables, they must be pressure canned. However, carrots can also be pickled and therefore can be water bath canned because of the high acid content."

She urges washing all fresh produce with plain water, and scrubbing or peeling produce when needed to remove hidden dirt and bacteria.

"Proper preparation helps to insure the quality and produce a safer product," said Blakeslee, who also suggests gathering necessary equipment and ingredients before the harvest.

"If you have a dial pressure gauge, contact your local extension office to get it tested for accuracy. The pressure canner brands we can test include National, Presto, Maid of Honor, and Magic Seal."

If you choose to freeze or dehydrate vegetables, most of them must be water or steam blanched, according to Blakeslee: "This helps to preserve texture, flavor, color and nutrition. Some fruits need to be treated with a color protectant, such as ascorbic acid, to prevent color changes."

"Strawberries are in season," Blakeslee said, noting a K-State publication that outlines the best ways to preserve strawberries. "They can be frozen, made into jam or jelly, dehydrated or made into pie filling."

Blakeslee also pointed to a K-State publication for preserving new potatoes, which should also be ready to harvest soon.

“Don’t forget to adjust processing for your altitude when canning. Kansas rises in elevation from east to west,” she added. Learn more about adjustments needed in the K-State publication, *What’s Your Elevation?*

All publications are available on the Southwind Extension website at [www.southwind.ksu.edu](http://www.southwind.ksu.edu) or in the Southwind offices.

Now is also the perfect time to test dial pressure gauges. This service is offered free of charge in the Extension offices. Due to Covid-19, office accessibility differs, so please call the Iola office at 620-365-2242 to schedule an appointment at your local office.