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WEEK SIX

Preserving the Harvest

Information provided with funding provided by USDA Specialty Crop

Week Six Overview

- **Purpose and Goals:** This session introduces participants to methods of preserving and storing specialty crops, allowing them to enjoy the harvest year-round. Participants will learn safe and practical ways to preserve fruits, vegetables, and herbs while maintaining flavor and nutrition.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
 - Identify common preservation techniques such as canning, freezing, and drying
 - Understand best practices for safely storing fruits, vegetables, and herbs
 - Apply hands-on preservation skills using West Virginia specialty crops
 - Plan for year-round use of seasonal produce in home meals



Why Preserve the Harvest?

Preserving the harvest helps you enjoy seasonal produce year-round while reducing waste and saving money. Benefits include:

- Extend freshness – Enjoy fruits, vegetables, and herbs long after harvest.
- Reduce food waste – Proper storage prevents spoilage.
- Save money – Store surplus crops from farmers markets or home gardens.
- Maintain nutrients and flavor – Preservation retains vitamins, minerals, and taste.
- Encourage seasonal cooking – Have fresh ingredients on hand for creative meals throughout the year.



West Virginia Specialty Crops for Preservation



Many specialty crops grown in West Virginia are ideal for canning, freezing, drying, or fermenting, making it easy to enjoy them year-round:

- Tomatoes & peppers – Perfect for sauces, salsas, roasted preserves, and even pickling.
- Berries – Strawberries, blueberries, and blackberries can be made into jams, jellies, syrups, or frozen for smoothies and desserts.
- Apples & peaches – Great for pie fillings, applesauce, preserves, or dried snacks that last through the winter.
- Squash & pumpkins – Can be pureed, roasted, added to soups, or preserved for baking and casseroles.
- Herbs (basil, parsley, mint) – Can be dried, frozen, or made into herb pastes for long-term use in cooking.

Common Preservation Techniques

Preserving your harvest ensures that fruits, vegetables, and herbs can be enjoyed year-round while maintaining flavor and nutrition.

Common techniques include:

- Canning – Using jars and heat to store fruits, vegetables, and sauces safely. Includes water bath canning for high-acid foods (such as tomatoes and berries) and pressure canning for low-acid foods (such as squash and beans).
- Freezing – A fast and easy method for preserving fruits, vegetables, and herbs. Blanching vegetables before freezing can help maintain color, flavor, and nutrients.
- Drying / Dehydrating – Removes moisture to extend shelf life. Ideal for herbs, fruits, and thinly sliced vegetables. Dried crops can be stored for months and used in cooking or teas.
- Fermentation – Preserves food while adding beneficial probiotics. Examples include sauerkraut, kimchi, and pickled vegetables, which can also enhance flavor and gut health.





Discussion Prompts: Preserving Specialty Crops

- Which West Virginia specialty crops do you grow or buy that you would like to preserve?
- What preservation techniques have you tried before, and what worked well (or didn't)?
- How can preserving your harvest help reduce food waste and save money?
- What challenges do you anticipate when preserving fruits, vegetables, or herbs at home?
- How might preserved crops be incorporated into daily meals throughout the year?
- How can sharing preserved foods strengthen connections with family, friends, or your local community?
- What new recipes or creative ways could you try with preserved crops to enjoy them differently?



Activity: Canning & Preserving Workshop

Overview: Participate in a hands-on workshop where participants will learn practical preservation techniques for specialty crops.

Workshop Focus:

- Canning – Learn how to safely can fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, berries, and peppers
- Freezing & Drying – Explore methods for extending the shelf life of squash, apples, and herbs
- Flavor & Storage Tips – Discover ways to maintain nutrients and taste while storing crops

Workshop Goals:

- Experience the process of preserving seasonal specialty crops firsthand
- Gain practical skills for storing and using crops throughout the year
- Increase confidence in using and preserving locally grown produce

