Hands-On Canning Workshops: Tomatoes and Relishes/Pickles

Two hands-on canning workshops are scheduled for this summer. The first will focus on preserving tomatoes and will be held on Tuesday, July 8 at the NCCE - Buncombe County Center from 1:00-4:00 pm. Participants will get to do actual hands-on canning and review other methods. Cost: $5. For more information or to register for this workshop call 255-5522.

The second workshop will focus on canning pickles and relishes and will be held on Thursday, July 10 at the NCCE - Madison County Center from 1:00-4:00 pm. Participants will get to do actual hands-on canning. Cost: $5. For more information or to register for this workshop call 649-2411.

Basic Home Maintenance Course

Have you wanted to make those basic home repairs but didn't know where to start? The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Center is offering a five-series Basic Home Maintenance Course beginning Tuesday, June 17 from 5:30-7:30 pm. Remaining dates for the course are: June 19, 24, 26 and July 1. The class will be held at the NCCE – Buncombe County Center, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville. Some of the topics to be covered are: saving on your heating and cooling bills, basic plumbing repairs, interior and exterior maintenance, landscaping and lawn care, indoor air quality, common household pest, etc. The fee of $20 includes all materials. Space is limited; pre-registration is required. For more information call 255-5522.

Tips for Keeping Cool

On hot summer days, active children need more water to drink than usual to keep from becoming dehydrated. Children often get involved in their play and forget they are thirsty. It’s up to adults to provide cool drinking water and to remind children to stop and take a drink. This should happen about every half hour on very hot days. Make sure there is a shady place for your child to play out of the sun such as under a tree, or on your deck, porch, or patio. Attach a sprinkler to your hose for your child to cool off on a hot day as this is safer than wading pools and can provide a fun way to keep cool. You can enjoy it with your child!
Ceiling Fans: Cool Breezes and Saving Money

As the weather gets warmer, we look for economical ways to cool our homes. Ceiling fans not only provide relief from the heat, but can also help save money and energy. To get the most from your ceiling fan ……………

- Make sure it has been properly installed. The UL-listed metal box in the ceiling should be marked “For use with ceiling fans.”
- Ensure that the blades are properly balanced. (A balancing kit may have been included in the original packaging or may be available from the manufacturer without charge.)
- Use the fan to move cool air in the summer (blades rotate counter-clockwise) and warm air in the winter (reverse the motor so the blades rotate clockwise). In the summer the fan doesn’t cool the room but creates a “wind chill” effect, making you feel cooler. That’s why it is recommended to turn off the fan when not in a room. In the winter, the rotation of the blades create a slight updraft, which moves the warmer air at the ceiling downward to warm the room.
- Adjust the household thermostat to account for the ceiling fan’s cooling or heating effect.

Of all the various types of fans on the market, the ceiling fans are considered the most effective for changing the room temperature because they create a draft throughout the entire room. When using a ceiling fan, a home’s thermostat setting can be raised by about 4ºF with no change in comfort.

Whole Grains May Help Trim That Belly and Reduce Health Risks

Recent research on whole grains shows promise that they support weight loss and especially belly fat loss. The fat that we carry around our stomachs or “belly fat” is linked with a higher risk for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The study group had a diet with whole grains while those in the control group were advised to have refined grains. The other recommendations on physical activity, dietary recommendations and other weight loss information were the same.

The group that ate all their grains as whole grains, lost more fat from their abdominal region than the control group that ate the refined grains. This group also had a significant reduction in blood levels of C-reactive protein, a marker that is linked to risks of heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes. By eating the whole grains this group also had an increase in fiber and magnesium, which may prevent or delay the onset of diabetes. The whole grain group aimed to have products that had at least 51% of the grains coming from whole grains. This meant the group had to read labels carefully to avoid products that contain a small percentage of whole grains and those which stated multi-grains but not whole grains. Here are ways that you can increase and include more whole grains in your diet:

1. Bread and rolls: 7-grain or 9-grain, honey wheat or rye – they all add chewy goodness to meals.
2. Hot cereals: Instant or regular oatmeal and other multi-grain hot cereals help kick-start your energy.
3. Cold cereals: Make a morning parfait with layers of crunchy cereal, fruit, and lowfat vanilla yogurt.
4. Muffins: Bran muffins are just the beginning. Try whole wheat muffins with blueberries.
5. Pancakes: Multi-grain or buckwheat pancakes are a luscious morning treat with fruit.
6. Pasta: Check out what’s new in the pasta aisle – new shapes and flavors made with whole grain.
7. Veggie burgers: Most veggie patties are made from soybeans, brown rice, barley and other grains.
8. Crackers: Crispy crackers made from whole wheat flour are perfect with peanut butter or soup.
9. Soups: Barley may be the best in soup, but whole brown rice is also very nice.
10. Salads: Cracked wheat makes a super salad called tabouleh.
11. Snacks: Create a tasty mix with whole grain cereal, dried fruit bits, sunflower seeds and almonds.
12. Desserts: Oatmeal is an ideal companion for fruit in home-baked treats.

Source: Tufts University, Health and Nutrition Letter, May 2008
Insect Repellent Alternatives

As we get outside and enjoy the activities that summer offers, we also have to deal with the biting pests that are attracted wanting a meal. The bloodsucking pests are attracted to people by a number of chemical and physical factors, including carbon dioxide from our breath, body heat, and chemicals in our sweat and on the surface of our skin. Certain colors and textures of clothing and even the odor from soaps, perfumes, lotions and hair care products may attract mosquitoes and some biting flies. Some personal protection can be achieved through the use of repellents. In recent years new personal protection products have been introduced on the market. While some still contain DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide) there are other choices available.

- **Picaridin**, also known as KBR 3023, is an ingredient found in many mosquito repellents used in Europe, Australia, Latin America and Asia for some time. Evidence indicates that it works very well, often comparable with DEET products of similar concentration. One product, containing 7% picaridin, has been distributed in the United States since 2004.

- **Oil of lemon eucalyptus** (also known as p-menthane 3,8-diol or PMD) is a plant-based mosquito repellent that provided protection time similar to low concentration DEET products in two recent studies. It is available in a variety of formulations throughout the United States.

Two important points to note about lemon-eucalyptus based products:

- According to the label, oil of lemon eucalyptus products should **NOT** be used on **CHILDREN UNDER 3 YEARS OLD**.
- The CDC’s recommendation refers only to EPA-registered repellents containing the active ingredient oil of lemon eucalyptus (PMD). “Pure” oil of lemon eucalyptus (e.g., essential oil) has not received similar, validated testing for safety and efficacy nor is it registered with EPA as an insect repellent. Therefore, use of only the essential oil is not included in the CDC’s recommendation.
- The most recent new repellent on the market was developed as a result of research of one of North Carolina State University's own, Dr. Michael Roe. The product uses a naturally occurring substance derived from wild tomato plants. The EPA has approved it for use on everyone, even infants. The product is now available in several stores nationwide.

Locally available products containing these chemicals are:

- Avon SKIN SO SOFT BUG GUARD Plus PICARIDIN.
- SC Johnson makes OFF! Botanicals which contains the Eucalyptus Oil.
- BioUD is the repellent derived from the tomato plants.

Key points to remember when using Deet and other repellents:

- With products containing DEET, the general “rule of thumb” is that products containing 10-30% active ingredient in the desired formulation (lotion, pump, and aerosol sprays, etc.) should be effective.
- Apply repellent only to exposed skin and to clothing the insects can bite through. Never apply repellent to skin under clothing as this increases absorption of the chemical into the skin.
- Use the minimum amount to cover your skin and/or clothing. Do not overexpose yourself or children.

Regardless of what personal protection product you choose to use, read the label thoroughly for application instructions as they pertain to when and where to apply and the appropriate age of the individual to use the product.

When using repellents on children:

- Never allow children to handle the chemical. Apply it to your hands and then spread it onto their skin.

- If you are using a new repellent, you may want to apply it first to a small area on their arm to make sure they're not allergic to it (from a skin sensitivity perspective).

Do not put repellent on the hands of small children. They might rub their eyes or stick their hands in their mouths and ingest some of the chemical.
Keeping Our Tailgate or Farmer's Market Food Safe

With the local produce starting to come in season and the opening of our tailgate and farmer's market, we consumers want to make sure our purchases stay fresh and safe after we buy them. We want to keep the beautiful bounty of local food at highest quality and safety when bringing them home. Foods can decline in nutritional and flavor quality and perishable foods like meats and eggs can pose a food safety concern if they are left sitting in cars after being bought. Try some of these tips for handling your market purchases for quality and safety.

- Different fruits and vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for proper storage. Store your uncut melons, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, tomatoes and winter squashes in a clean, dry, well-ventilated place away from direct sunlight at room temperature.
- Unripe nectarines, peaches, pears and plums, as well as avocados and kiwifruits, can ripen at room temperature and then be stored in the refrigerator.
- Store your fruits and vegetables in different refrigerator crisper drawers because the vegetables can give off odors that affect the fruit quality and the fruits can give off ethylene gas that can shorten the life of the vegetables.
- You can store produce in perforated plastic bags which help maintain moisture yet provide air flow to prevent spoilage from molds and bacteria growth that can occur with unperforated plastic bags.
- Keep meats and produce separated in the refrigerator to prevent cross contamination. Use pans or plates with the meats so that juices do not leak out of packages and contaminate other foods.
- Keeping your refrigerator at 40°F or lower will ensure that your foods are stored at a safe temperature. Bacteria and other microorganisms that cause food borne illnesses are more likely to grow at temperatures above 40°F.
- Wash your hands before preparing produce.
- Wash your produce thoroughly with running water even produce from your garden. This will remove any dirt and unhealthy organisms. It is best to wash produce right before preparing it, because it has a natural protective coating that helps keep in moisture and freshness. Do not use soap or detergents to wash vegetables because they can leave a residue on the produce that may make you sick. You can use a brush to clean hard to clean produce.
- Wash and rinse produce even if you are not going to eat the skin or peels, such as melons. Bacteria can transfer from the outer skins to the fruit of the produce when cut or peeled.
- Refrigerate cut produce because bacteria and molds can grow on the cut surfaces once the protective skin has been cut.

Remember to try some new produce this season. You can find local produce at the tailgate markets, farmers market and roadside stands, as well as in our grocery stores. The less the produce has to travel, the fresher it is and the more nutrients it has. It is also a way of supporting our local economy.

When the Weather is Nice, Turn Off Television and Computer

Get out of the house and go outdoors with your child. Enjoy the fresh air and sunshine together. Children benefit from playing in the yard and going for walks. Whether you live in the city or in the country, your child will learn about nature and things going on in your neighborhood. Play ball together - this is fun with children of all ages. If your child is older, go for bike rides. You can have a picnic in the yard at meal times. Go out in the evening - once it gets dark, look at the stars in the sky and other lights that might be in your neighborhood. This is a good time to talk with each other. For example, you can tell your child stories about when you were little, talk about the day he was born, or plan some things to do together in the next few weeks. This builds communication with your child that will last a lifetime. Play and have fun together. Those memories will last forever.
It’s Not Just the Gas

How quickly things change. In the past year the average price of a gallon of gas has jumped 53¢ to well above $3.44. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) for food in the U. S. has increased by 4%. It is projected food prices will increase by 5% in 2008. Higher prices have been caused by many factors: droughts and climate changes, higher energy costs, speculation, and increased demand by a growing population.

As painful as this may all be, the rising food costs are worse because we spend so much of our budgets feeding ourselves (12.8% on average) and we only use 3.4% feeding our cars.

Experts list several strategies to help families get the most from their grocery dollars. They are:

-- **Create a food budget.** Figure out how much money you have to spend on groceries this month—include Food Stamps, WIC, commodity foods and cash you will have designated for food. Take only the amount of money you have budgeted for groceries to the store so you won't spend more.

-- **Plan meals before you go.** Write a menu of meals and snacks you have planned for the week. Make sure they are affordable and fit your budget. Make sure to include a list of foods you already have on hand.

-- **Make a grocery list.** Make a list of groceries you need to prepare the meals and snacks you have planned. Choose the grocery store that will save you the most money.

-- **Shop the grocery ads and look for coupons.** Use coupons only on items you actually use. Don’t buy something simply because you have a coupon. Look for Buy-One, Get-One free items in the grocery ads. Sometimes you can buy one for half price or the second item can be frozen.

-- **Buy less expensive store brands.** Store brands are usually on the top or bottom shelves.

-- **Don’t shop on an empty stomach.** You are likely to buy more—including unnecessary and expensive items.

-- **Don’t shop with children** especially if they are tired or sick.

-- **Beware of the end caps.** Foods on aisle “end caps” are not necessarily on sale.

-- **Compare prices by using cost per unit of various foods.** The unit price is usually listed on the grocery shelf. This is the price per ounce, gallon, pound or any unit of measure.

Our main goal is to eat well and not break the bank. As shoppers, we should plan ahead, be prudent and not PANIC.

Introduction to Sharon Carter

One of the best kept secrets at Cooperative Extension has been Sharon Carter, Extension Nutrition Program Assistant, EFNEP. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is federally funded to help families with limited resources who are most at risk to suffer from hunger, food insecurity and the inability to connect with available support systems. EFNEP has been offered through Buncombe County Cooperative Extension and supporting North Carolina families with the greatest needs since 1969.

Sharon has implemented this program for many years. Recently, the decision was made to expand the newsletter, and invite Sharon to assist in writing articles. For additional information about the EFNEP program, contact Sharon Carter at the Extension Center.
Frequently Asked Questions from the IRS Website

Q. Is my stimulus payment taxable?
A. No. You will not owe tax on your payment when you file your 2008 federal income tax return. But you should keep a copy of the IRS letter you receive later this year listing the amount of your payment.

Q. If my stimulus payment is not going to affect my 2008 tax refund or increase the tax I owe next year, why is it I need to retain the letter that lists how much I received?
A. In the event you do not qualify for the full amount on your 2007 return but you do on your 2008 return, you will need to have the letter as a record of the amount you previously received. [New 4/11/08]

Q. Will the payment I receive in 2008 reduce my 2008 refund or increase the amount I owe for 2008?
A. No, the stimulus payment will not reduce your refund or increase the amount you owe when you file your 2008 return.

Q. I don’t qualify for a stimulus payment based on my 2007 return but my tax situation will be different in 2008. Will I qualify for any special benefit?
A. Possibly. The 2008 tax instructions will include a worksheet to help those who did not qualify for a payment or those who received a reduced amount determine if they can obtain a benefit when they file their 2008 tax returns next year.

Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.