Learn more about canning or just brush up on the latest information on food preservation from canning to freezing to drying by attending Canning and Preserving Made Easy. This workshop is an introduction to canning, pickling, jams and jellies, freezing, drying and storage. Two workshops are being offered: Tuesday, June 10 at the N. C. Cooperative Extension - Buncombe County Center, 94 Coxe Avenue in Asheville, from 5:30 pm – 9:00 pm OR Tuesday, June 17 at the N. C. Cooperative Extension - Madison County Center in Marshall from 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm. Cost for each workshop is $5. To register for the workshop in Buncombe County, please call 255-5522 or to register for the workshop in Madison County, please call 649-2411.

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. The second workshop will focus on canning pickles and relishes and will be held on Thursday, July 10 at the Madison County Cooperative Extension Center from 1:00-4:00 pm. Participants will get to do actual hands-on canning. Cost for each workshop is $5. To register for the workshop in Buncombe County, please call 255-5522 or to register for the workshop in Madison County, please 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.

Ozone Season Begins

The month of May starts ozone season and the media begins to announce the ozone levels expected each day. The ozone levels are typically lower in the morning, rising to higher levels in the afternoons and dissipating in the evenings. People exposed to ozone may experience coughing, irritated eyes or nose, discomfort when breathing, or headaches. If you have experienced these symptoms on elevated ozone days in the past, or consider yourself in a sensitive group, consider avoiding strenuous activity outdoors on Ozone Action Days. Because ozone levels are usually higher during the hottest part of the afternoon, avoid being outside during this time.
Safe Drinking Water

If your drinking water comes from a public water supply, it is generally safe and is tested periodically. If your water supply comes from a private water source, the testing is a decision the water user must make. Although not required by any state agency, testing a private water supply annually is recommended.

There is no single test to determine the safety of drinking water. Many contaminants can present a health risk if present in sufficient concentrations. Other contaminants, while not a health risk, can make water less desirable for use. It would be very costly - and in most cases - unnecessary - to test for them all. Users of private drinking water wells must decide which contaminants to have their water tested for, and must order tests accordingly. Tests for nitrate and bacteria are often used as general indicators of the safety of private well water since they can cause health problems. However, testing for nitrate and bacteria does not guarantee the water is safe, as other contaminants could be present.

Tests should be done for other substances when specific contamination is suspected. This might be the result of a spill, backflow, or other such event. It might be the result of a product or contaminant being mixed, used, stored, or disposed of near the well. Any contaminant detected in a nearby private or public well should be suspected.

So even if you are doing everything you can to prevent your well from being contaminated, it may become polluted from other people’s activities. The yearly testing is necessary because groundwater travels and may pick up pollutants elsewhere.

Why It Is Important To Preserve Foods Properly

Growth of the bacterium Clostridium botulinum in canned food may cause botulism—a deadly form of food poisoning. These bacteria exist either as spores or as vegetative cells. The spores, which are comparable to plant seeds, can survive harmlessly in soil and water for many years. When ideal conditions exist for growth, the spores produce vegetative cells which multiply rapidly and may produce a deadly toxin within 3 to 4 days of growth in an environment consisting of:

- a moist, low-acid food
- a temperature between 40° and 120°F
- less than 2 percent oxygen

Most bacteria, yeasts, and molds are difficult to remove from food surfaces. Washing fresh food reduces their numbers only slightly. Peeling root crops, underground stem crops, and tomatoes reduces their numbers greatly. Blanching also helps, but the vital controls are the method of canning and making sure the recommended research-based process times found in the USDA's Complete Guide to Home Canning are used.

Botulinum spores are on most fresh food surfaces. Because they grow only in the absence of air, they are harmless on fresh foods. Yeasts and molds can also grow with ideal conditions and that is why it is important to water bath our high acid foods in order to destroy those microorganisms. We need to use pressure canners for our low acid foods because the Botulinum spores are not destroyed until we reach temperatures higher than 240°F and this temperature can not be reached using water bath canning. This is the reason why we need to can our green beans and other vegetables using pressure canners.

The processing times in researched based recipes ensure destruction of the largest expected number of heat-resistant microorganisms in home-canned foods. Changes in these recipes have occurred over the years because our microorganisms have changed over the years and are stronger. Properly canned food will be free of spoilage if lids seal and jars are stored below 95°F, since they are sterile and bacteria, molds and yeasts will not grow. Storing jars at 50° to 70°F enhances retention of quality. For more information on canning and for researched tested recipes call our office.

Source: National Center of Home Food Preservation, University of Georgia
Get Biggest Bang From Tax Rebate Checks

Already making plans for how you'll spend your tax rebate check from the federal government? The first economic stimulus checks are due to arrive this month. Consider some of the following ways to make the very most out of your tax rebate check:

Open an emergency account. Most Americans do not have money set aside for those financial emergencies that always seem to happen when there is no cash available. The rebate check is a great start or addition to an emergency account. The goal might be to have three to six months of monthly fixed expenses in the account.

Pay for repairs. Maintaining expensive possessions now will result in dollars saved tomorrow. Use the refund money to repair a leaky roof before it develops into a bigger problem; replace car tires with new, safer ones; or fix home ceilings, walls, floors, doors, or windows.

Make an extra home mortgage payment. Though you will not feel the benefit immediately, making an extra mortgage payment now puts you one payment ahead and can save you a mortgage payment later.

Fund Your Retirement Account. About 30% of all working Americans have no money invested for their retirement. If you are one of them, seriously consider setting up or contributing to an IRA account.

Open a 529 College Savings Plan. A four-year college education can cost upwards of $100,000. Save for your child's college education with a 529 plan. It works much like a Roth IRA, and withdrawals are tax-free when used for higher education purposes.

Source: Shirley Anderson-Porisch, Family Resource Management Educator, University of Minnesota Extension

Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines

The American Cancer Society has guidelines for the early detection of breast cancer. These guidelines are for those at average risk for cancer. If you are at a higher risk, you would have other guidelines which may include different screenings or beginning at earlier ages.

- Yearly mammograms starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.
- Clinical breast exam should be part of a periodic health exam, about every 3 years for women in their 20’s and 30’s and every year for women 40 and over.
- Women should know how their breasts normally feel and report any breast change promptly to their health care providers. Breast self-exam is an option for women starting in their 20’s.
- Women at high risk (greater than 20% lifetime risk) should get an MRI and a mammogram every year. Women at moderately increased risk (15% to 20% lifetime risk) should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of adding MRI screening to their yearly mammogram. Yearly MRI screening is not recommended for women whose lifetime risk of breast cancer is less than 15%.

The lifetime risk is determined based on one of several accepted risk assessment tools that look at family history and other factors.

Do You Own a Heat Pump?

A homeowner should not set back the thermostat on a conventional heat pump when it is in the heating mode. Changing the thermostat setting frequently will cancel out any savings achieved by lowering the temperature setting since the unit will operate more inefficiently should the heat strip or emergency heat come on. However, in its cooling mode, the heat pump operates like any other air conditioner so manually turning up the thermostat will save money.
De-Stressing the End of Grade Testing

May is the time for spring flowers and warm weather, and unfortunately it is also the time for end-of-grade testing for our children. As their minds are itching to begin summer, children can become even more frustrated and anxious about testing. Here are some signs of stress and anxiety: irritability, depression, impulsive behaviors, fear, worry, sleep problems, nervousness, headaches, stomach aches and other physical signs. Here are some tips to help them:

- be available to listen to your child and give them all your attention at that time
- have realistic expectations for the child
- teach them some simple relaxation techniques
- help them identify their learning style and ways to learn information
- provide nutritious meals and have them get plenty of sleep.
- cut down on chaos at home—where’s my shoe, my book bag, etc.
- don’t over commit the child with too many extra activities
- manage family time wisely and take time to have fun
- help them prepare for tests and discussions

Before you know it the tests will be over and your happy child will be ready for a summer of fun.

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.

Check out Buncombe County Center’s website at...http://buncombe.ces.ncsu.edu