



Misty's View

of Preserving the Harvest

The sky is intensely blue; there's a crisp snap in the air and the first hints of red and gold adorn the trees. My favourite season has arrived! Fall is a time of renewal, not a time of decline, especially if you view the return from vacationland of family, friends and school

mates as an opportunity to **really get cooking again!**

Summer salads and grilled meats are fresh, fast foods; but autumn fare is slow, thoughtful and rich in flavour. It takes time to build structure into braised dishes, fruit compotes, homemade tomato sauces, mincemeat filling for Christmas pies.

The comforting return to the stove and oven signals preparations for the long winter ahead. Think of the pioneers who carved out some of the life we know today. They had to prepare to fill their larders with food stuffs that would take them into the spring and early summer months. Their lives depended on it.

As current proprietors of the earth, we look to the past these days, for ways of being more "green." As individuals, we might consider learning how to make the most of the fall harvest ourselves like our forefathers did. Instead of walking past the large bushels of peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, apples and pears that show up in late August and September, you might decide to take a few home with you this

time. Once purchased, you will need to rally your troops to help you **turn these mountains of fresh products into conserved, preserved edible delights.**

Oven-Roasted Tomatoes

Don't try to do it alone! I know many Italians who have a veritable family brigade of household helpers who know that the arrival of several bushels of Roma tomatoes means only one thing, mass production. Later in the year, however, these conscripted participants are happy and proud to have the fruits of their labour show up in memorable family dishes.

You can take the harvest bulk food challenge even if you only take one bushel home. Try an easy product for the first time, like oven-roasted tomatoes. There are many recipes available that will turn a large quantity of Roma tomatoes into homemade sun-dried tomatoes.

Get the entire family involved. All it takes is a son or daughter to help with deseeding the quartered pieces, an oven set low at 130 degrees, and an evening plus overnight stay of 12 hours on trays for the prepared tomatoes to be ready.

Depending on the herbs and olive oil asked for in your recipe, these tender, ruby slivers of tomato will delight you on pizzas, in pastas, or simply added to stews, soups, sauces or salad dressings, for an intense injection of rich, tomato flavour.

If you are more courageous, I suggest purchasing a home canning kit that will allow you to preserve applesauce, jams, jellies, relishes, soups and sauces. This standard canner method is similar to those used by culinary experts like your great grandmother, grandmother or mother, and uses sterilized glass jars as safe containers for your culinary creations. And if you are particularly successful with a recipe you might plan on dressing up your jars and **giving them out at holiday time!**

Capture Freshness

Don't want to bother with jars? Today's freezer bags are especially designed to guard your food against dehydration for up to six months. Ever wondered how to preserve green beans, for example? Blanching and refreshing is the answer. Just bring a very large pot of water to a rolling boil, drop in the beans, fish them out with a sieve once they are a brilliant emerald green (about two minutes) then quickly plunge them into a bath of ice water. Re-boil the water and you're ready for the next batch. Make sure to keep the bath water full of ice, so as to shock the beans cold, arresting the cooking process before it damages the delicate green chlorophyll. These par-cooked vegetables are ready to be drained and stored in a freezer bag. Volia! You have captured some **freshness to enjoy when the snow flies.**

What's most important about getting involved in the harvest bonanza is the message you send home to your family and friends. Yes, we live in a world where products are designed for convenience. Yes, we are busy. Yes, we might have missed certain life lessons on our path to success. But we might also look to the past to infuse the future through simple, thoughtful acts in our kitchens.

Food influences the world; how we use it can too. **The harvest is in. What will you do with it?**

Misty Ingraham and Bill Sharpe of Ancaster own the catering business The Portable Feast at Home.