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English 2710

Canning Folk Group

The sun has been up a while but it is not yet hot. I grab my red buckets and head out to the garden. I start at the far end of the garden and carefully inspect the plants. I pick only the ripest tomatoes as I move from plant to plant. As I move the leaves to pick the tomatoes, the fragrance of the tomato plants fills the air. It doesn’t take long to fill up my two red buckets with tomatoes. Next I go over to the pepper plants. There are many hot peppers to pick today. I collect those and add them to my bucket. I then go and find five large onions and add them to my bucket. It takes me two trips to take the buckets into my house. On the second trip I stop in the garage and get two large bulbs of garlic. Once everything is gathered in the kitchen I can set to work making my salsa and putting it up. I am a member of a group of people who do home canning.

People have been preserving food in various ways and handing down recipes for generations. According to Better Homes and Garden,s a French confectioner named Appert developed the method of preserving food in a bottle in 1810. Eve Adamson (2010) states,

Humans have been preserving food for thousands of years on every continent and in many ways. To the colonists who settled in North America, food preservation wasn’t just a way to minimize waste; it was a matter of life and death. Without properly storing the harvest and preserving the meat; a family wouldn’t make it through winter. Food preservation began long before the first European explorers caught sight of the New World. The colonists already possessed food-preservation skills, which they honed and perfected in order to survive the harsh New England winters.

The number of people who do home canning seems to be decreasing because the need for home canning has decreased over the years. Food products are readily available at the local grocery store. Nicole Sipe (2010) states

There once was a time when canning and preserving food was a necessity. It was preserve, or perish. Can or be canned. Put up, or shut up. Grocery stores and convenience food were either unaffordable or entirely unavailable. Refrigerators and freezers did not exist or were available only to those who could afford luxury.

Fast forward a few generations. Today all the food we could ever want is as close as our nearest grocery store –canned, jarred or preserved for us. Fresh food can go straight from the store into our refrigerators or freezers, and chill until we decided to eat it. Fast food is available any time, day or night, and we don’t even have to leave the car to get it.

The reason people do home canning has changed. Now people want to do it for many reasons including the desire to know where their food comes from, enjoying an old family recipe, and wanting to put up their harvest. Ellie Topp and Margret state in The complete book of Small-bath preserving

Many of us remember our grandmothers spending long hours in the summer preserving the produce from their large gardens. While few of us have a desire to return to the era of preserving large quantities of food for the cold months, we are developing a taste for new flavors and want to use them to enhance an otherwise simple meal. A flavorful bit of chutney, a rich salsa, a crisp pickle, a special sauce, or a flavored oil or vinegar adds interest to a meal while fitting a healthy lifestyle. Jams, conserves, marmalades, and jellies can be spread on toast, English muffins or tea biscuits with no added butter necessary. (Pg. 9, 2008)

There are a few people I know who do home canning. This connection makes us part of a folk group formed through shared interests or skills. Martha Sims and Martine Stevens state in Living Folklore

Often more distinctive than these other types of groups are groups derived from shared interests or skills. These groups may begin in places such as classrooms or offices and expand outward, taking a shape generated by their numbers. Sometimes, individuals may come together seeking others with common skills and/or interests and form a group based on those commonalities.

In the summertime, what is currently coming on in the garden, and how we are putting it up, is often the topic of conversation when we get together. We often share recipes to add variety to the ways we can use our produce and talk about various types of equipment that make the process easier. Being a part of this group connects us to other groups as well. This connects us to older generations who want to share recipes for things they once canned but are no longer able to. It connects us to gardeners who do not can but want to make sure what they grow doesn’t go to waste.

# Works Cited

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