

Emailed July 4, 2018



All About Berries
by Summer Brasuel & Sue Mosbacher
UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

We are fortunate in El Dorado County to have an abundance of wild and cultivated berries. Gardens, creek beds, road edges, bike paths, farmers markets and stores all have a colorful display of juicy jewels ready to be eaten – or saved to savor next winter.

Gently rinse berries just before eating or preserving them, but don't soak the berries. To clean, place the berries in a colander, dip into cool water, gently swish and drain, then pat dry with paper towels. If you let berries sit too long while moist, they can quickly mold.

If you have more berries than you can eat, freeze, dry, or can them. Preserve berries as soon as possible after harvest and at their peak of ripeness.

Freezing berries is the easiest preservation method and gives you the flexibility to use them in many different ways when convenient to you. The easiest method is to place a layer of clean, dry berries on a plate or small cookie sheet in the freezer. When frozen, put the berries in an airtight freezer container and remove as much air as possible before sealing.

You can also freeze berries with sugar to generate a natural syrup, or using a sugar water syrup. Place crumpled freezer paper under the lid to keep the berries submerged beneath the liquid. Note that unsweetened berries lose quality faster than those packed in sugar or sugar syrups.

Remember, air is not your berry's buddy in the freezer. Air helps water in the food evaporate, creating ice crystals on the outside of the berries, causing freezer burn.

Tip: if you freeze using sugar, measure out the sugar and write the amount used on the label. This way you can reduce the amount of sugar required in a recipe using the frozen berries. For example, if you plan to make blackberry jam using your frozen berries, measure the amount of berries used in the jam recipe, add ½ cup of sugar, package them for freezing, and label the package "X cups crushed blackberries and ½ cup sugar." Later, when you make the jam, subtract the ½ cup of sugar from the amount called for in the recipe.

Emailed July 4, 2018

Dehydrate berries whole, halved or as fruit leather. Blueberries and other berries with a thick skin need to be dipped in boiling water for 15-30 seconds to crack the skins so the air and heat can dry the berries from the inside. Otherwise you'll have a dry berry on the outside and mold on the inside.

There are a multitude of home canned berry products such as jams, butters, conserves, syrups, berry flavored vinegar, and shrubs. Be sure to use reputable recipes that follow the research-based process from the National Center For Home Food Preservation (nchfp.uga.edu), and Ball, (www.freshpreserving.com).

On Wednesday, July 11, 2018, the UCCE Master Gardeners and Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are having a joint class, All About Berries, at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive, in Cameron Park. Learn how to grow blackberries, raspberries, blueberries and strawberries to cultivate your own bumper crop. Then explore different ways to preserve them to use all year. Join us from 9-Noon. The class is free and no reservations are required.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program and events, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!