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There’s still time to preserve garden produce

But the days are dwindling for canning summer’s fruit, vegetables

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Most Midwest gardeners are winding down the summer season, with the bounties of their work slowly dwindling to just a few more fruit or vegetables.

It also marks the last few weeks of work for those who prefer to store canned foods, said Kansas State University food safety specialist Karen Blakeslee.

“Canning season starts to wind down as gardens finish producing produce,” she said. “Don’t waste those last few tomatoes or winter squash. Many garden foods can be preserved by canning, freezing or dehydrating.”

Blakeslee is also the coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for food safety, which maintains a wealth of information on food preservation and recipe sources online.

Among the current recommendations for squeezing out a few more canned goods, she suggests:

- **Pick the last tomatoes before a frost or freeze.** Tomatoes left on the vine after a freeze should not be canned because their acidity changes. They should be eaten, frozen or dehydrated instead.

- **Can green tomatoes just like ripe tomatoes.** Add bottled lemon juice or citric acid to acidify green tomatoes. They can be used in a variety of pickled products or even pie filling.

- **Pumpkin or winter squash must be canned in cubes only.** There is no research to support canning mashed pumpkin or winter squash. Freeze it instead.
• **Soup is a good use of many vegetables with added meat.** Do not add thickeners, pasta, rice or dairy products before canning. Those can be added to the safely-canned soup mix later.

**What next?**

Once the canning season wraps up, Blakeslee suggests cleaning and maintaining equipment before putting it away for the year.

“Wash and clean canners to remove leftover food debris and hard water deposits,” she said. “Be sure all parts are clean and in working order now to save time next year.”

Unused jars and rings should be inspected for defects or damage. Blakeslee suggests crumpling clean paper towels inside canners to absorb odors and moisture. Then store equipment in a clean, dry location.

“Taking time to care for equipment now can help extend its life for years to come,” she said.

Learn more about food preservation at [www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation](http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation).

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story
Rapid Response Center, [www.rrc.k-state.edu](http://www.rrc.k-state.edu)

Food preservation and recipe sources, [www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/index.html](http://www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/index.html)

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