

Off Season Workout
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Here it is January and if we look out into the garden, there are no tomatoes for salsa, apricots to dehydrate or blackberries for jam. Just because it's the off season, do you think the World Series Champion San Francisco Giants are resting on their laurels? No way, they have an off season workout program and so should you.

Food preservation has some specialized equipment that needs annual tuning up. Pressure canners, knives and information are just some of the items in the food preserver's kitchen that could use some off season attention. The time to tune up your equipment is now, not when there is a batch of your favorite jam or chutney on the stove.

Pressure canners have several areas that should be inspected. Every pressure canner has a gauge that should be calibrated every year. The Master Food Preservers' office has a volunteer who is trained to certify them. The pressure dial must be within 2 pounds to be considered safe. You can call the Master Food Preserver hotline at (530) 621-5506 to schedule an appointment. It only takes a few minutes.

Your pressure canner may have a rubber seal in the lid. We recommend you take the seal out and inspect it for crack, tears or other signs of aging. Some canners, like the All American brand don't use a rubber seal. Instead they are machined for a perfect fit. We recommend these be inspected for scratches, dents or other damage that could interfere with a perfect seal.

If your canner has a weight, the vent hole should get some attention. Once in a while a jar will over flow or break in the canner, releasing product. That product can get stuck in the vent, restricting the air flow. This can lead to a total obstruction of the vent and dangerous pressure levels inside the canner. A pipe cleaner and some elbow grease will make short work of the vent. While you are inspecting and cleaning the pressure canner, take a quick look at your pressure cooker as well.

Many food preservers have kitchen equipment dedicated to their hobby. Knives are one of those invaluable tools. A sharp kitchen knife is handy for chopping and slicing fruit and vegetables for preserving. A sharp knife not only cuts faster, it cuts safer too. Raley's and Bel Air offer a free sharpening service in their meat department. Check with the meat department on your next visit. Please limit your request to one or two knives and expect a 24 hour turnaround.

Slicers, food processors and other specialty equipment could use a thorough cleaning. A utensil put away with even the slightest amount of product in a tight space could become a breeding ground for harmful bacteria. While we are in the cleaning mode, let's take a look at unused lids and pectins to make sure they aren't too old or haven't expired.

Dehydrators and other electric appliances need a little attention too. Check the manufacturer's manual or web site for cleaning and maintenance and cleaning procedures.

Finally, information updates. Recipes and preserving recommendations are always being researched and updated. The Master Food Preservers always recommend using recipes from a published source, and not using recipes over 5 years old. Check your

books and see if they need to be updated. We are always updating our skills and information and happy to share them with you. Our public class schedule will be out soon.

If you'd like to become a Master Food Preserver, applications for the 2011 classes are available on line and at the office. If you would like to have a Master Food Preserver speak to your organization or club about food safety or food preservation, please call us.

The Master Food Preservers can be reached at 311 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA or (530) 621-5506 if you have any questions about safe home food preservation. Leave a message with your question and a Master Food Preserver will get back to you with an answer.