



CHAPTER 8

PRESERVING YOUR HARVEST

IN THIS SECTION

- Saving for Later 151
- Seed Saving 151
- Marketing Your Excess Produce 153
- Farm Stands 158

One thing about gardens—they don't always cooperate with what's easiest for you. While it would be nice to have a steady stream of ripened produce coming into the kitchen, it's rarely as convenient as that. Instead, you'll have seventeen zucchini squashes ready at the same time, or five pints of green beans, or forty-nine tomatoes. As delicious as they are to eat fresh, it's not always possible to consume forty-nine tomatoes before they spoil.

For this reason, we have preservation processes with which to save produce for future eating.



Harvest time—a glorious time of year! But what will you do with all of your garden produce?
iStockphoto.com/Mark Jensen



Preserving your harvest can be accomplished by drying, freezing, or canning. These onions are drying in the late summer sun, and can then be stored in a cool, dark place for several months.

SAVING FOR LATER

The processes of drying, freezing, and canning are far too complicated to fully explain within the confines of this text, but here is a brief explanation of each:

- Drying is popular for fruits such as apples and pears but also very popular with beans. You can also dry peppers, okra, summer squash, and many other vegetables.
- Freezing is our personal favorite. It's ridiculously easy to freeze berries, corn, apples, and zucchini. Some vegetables such as green beans and peas require blanching (lightly cooking at a rapid boil) prior to freezing, but this, too, is an easy step and well worth the effort for the reward that you gain: perfectly ripe, "picked at the peak of perfection" vegetables that cook up beautifully for delightful winter eating.

- Canning is a long-favored procedure for preserving foods, but it requires quite a bit of equipment and know-how in order to do it correctly. Seek the advice of a knowledgeable friend or relative to teach you the process.

SEED SAVING

If you've raised heirloom (open pollinated, not hybrid) vegetables, then you may want to consider saving some of their seed for your next garden.

We love saving bean seeds; they're so plump and impressive it really feels like you're saving something important.





Many vegetables, including these green beans, should be blanched prior to freezing.



These beans have been blanched and then placed in heavy-duty freezer bags, ready to be frozen for future use.

It sounds simple, doesn't it? Saving seeds—how involved could it be, anyway? It's true that seed saving isn't particularly difficult or time-consuming, but it does require a certain amount of know-how in order to achieve success. If you don't know the basics, you're sure to run into some roadblocks.

Things to consider:

It's important to understand the characteristics of the particular vegetable from which you wish

to save seeds. You must understand the type of pollination it requires (is it self-pollinated, wind pollinated, or insect pollinated?), as well as whether or not the plants need to be isolated from other varieties to avoid cross-pollination. You'll also need to know if the vegetable produces seed annually or biennially. You could wait all season for a particular vegetable to produce seed, but if it's a biennial, it won't produce until the second season.



Saving heirloom seeds is an excellent end-of-summer project.



Sunflower seeds are easy to save and a lot of fun to harvest. Have a sunflower-seed party and collect them all!

The procedures for saving seeds vary depending on the type of vegetable. The process for drying and saving tomato seeds is vastly different from the process of saving seeds from a green bean. (As an aside, we love saving bean seeds; they're so plump and impressive it really feels like you're saving something important.)

Research the necessary information about your vegetable varieties before attempting to save seed.

MARKETING YOUR EXCESS PRODUCE

Perhaps you have an abundance of extra produce—more than you can easily consume, save, or disperse among your friends. Perhaps you'd like to earn a bit of extra money to put toward your garden project next year. If any of these are true, then you may want to consider marketing your vegetables for sale.

The most familiar way of marketing homegrown vegetables is to set up at a farmers' market. Many

communities have a weekly farmers' market, so all you need to do is contact the coordinator for details on how to become involved. There is typically a small fee involved with setting up at the market for a day, but this small investment can be easily recouped by your sales at the market.

SETTING UP YOUR BOOTH

Your booth can be as simple or as elaborate as you choose. A small tent can be very nice, as it offers the protection of shade, which is more comfortable for you and your customers—and better for your produce too. If a tent isn't an option, make sure that you wear a large hat and plenty of sunscreen. In either case, you'll need a portable table (or two) on which to display your vegetables. A pretty tablecloth is always a plus; you want your stand to be attractive and eye-catching, and you want people to come and take a look at your offerings. You might bring along some baskets in which to display your vegetables.

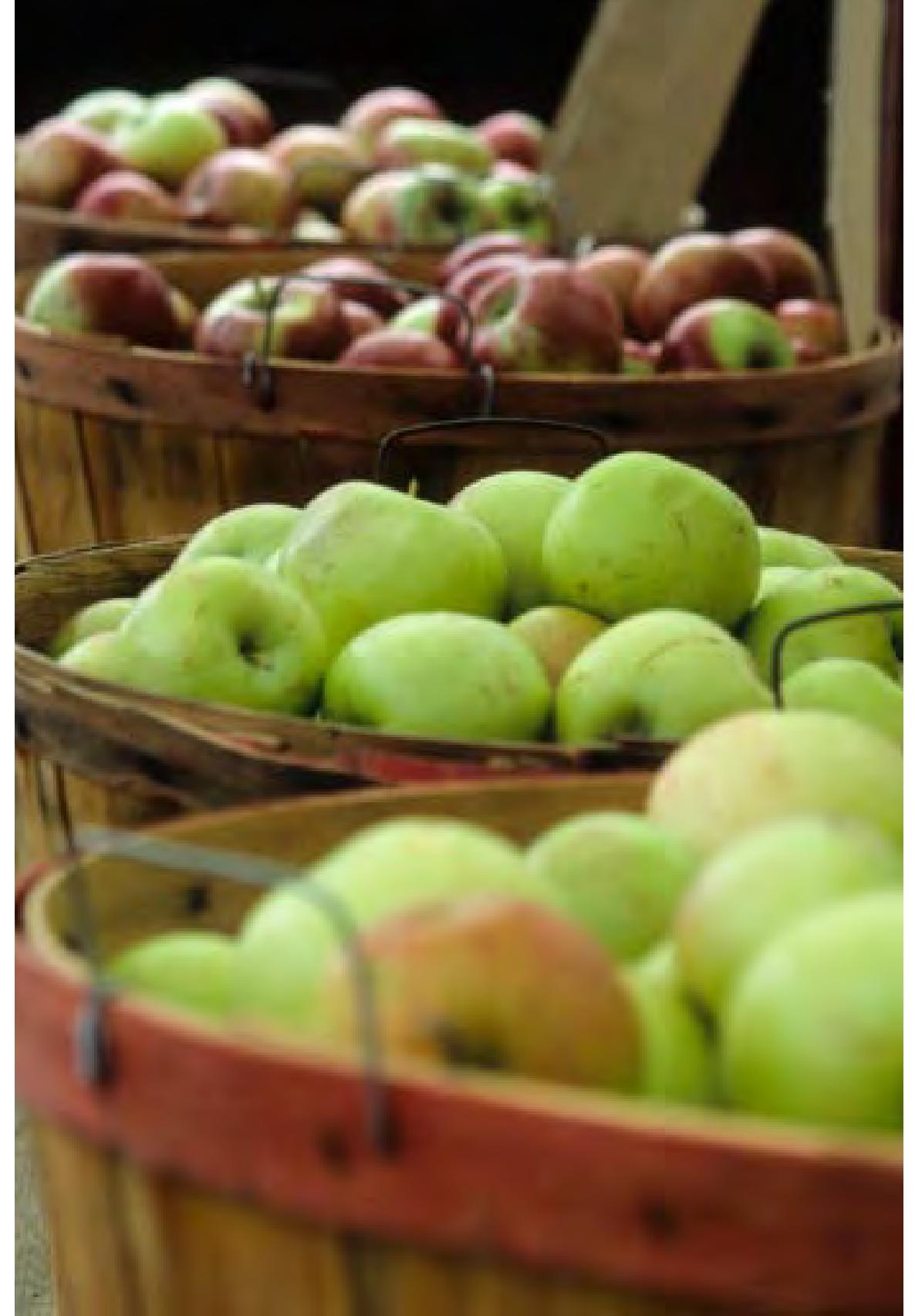




To sell your farm produce, your first stop will likely be your local farmers' market.



Baskets and boxes will help keep your vegetables organized at the farmers' market.



Don't forget your fruits! Baskets of apples, pints of berries, clusters of grapes—there's no end to the marketing possibilities.



SIGNS

As you plan for your market stand, pay special attention to your signs. Your signs are one of the most important parts of your market stand. Ideally, your signs will be large enough to be easily legible, as well as clearly explaining the type of produce that you're offering.

Top tips for great signs:

- **Less is more:** "HEIRLOOM TOMATOES, \$1 EACH" in large letters is more concise and effective than "YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE! BUNCHES OF HEIRLOOM TOMATOES AND THEY TASTE GREAT TOO AND YOU SHOULD BUY SOME FOR YOUR GRANDMOTHER AND YOUR AUNT SUE BECAUSE THEY ARE ONLY \$1 EACH" in small letters.
- **Spelling counts:** Watch your spelling and punctuation. You're aiming to project an appearance of professionalism, and if your sign says "FRESH TAMATOS and BEENS," people are less likely to take you seriously.
- **Contrasting colors:** If you are using yellow poster board for your sign, then you wouldn't want to use orange lettering—it would be too difficult to read, especially at a distance. In the same manner, if your poster board is white, then you'll want to use a lettering that is dark and easy to read from far away. If people can't read your sign easily, they won't be as likely to come and view your produce.



Oops—"Punktins" isn't the correct spelling. Always make sure that everything is spelled properly.



Much better! Attention to detail is important, even when making farmers' market signs.

Always remember to bring cash with which to make change for your customers. It's not convenient for your customers if you don't have ample change. And don't forget to bring a chair and a good book!

PRICING

It can be difficult to know exactly how to price your vegetables for sale. On one hand, who can put a price on the hours of hard work and effort that you've put into your garden? On the other hand, who's going to pay \$75 for a single cucumber?

To get an idea of the prices of produce in your local area, visit your farmers' market before you set up your own stand. Look around at all of the stands, and compare the prices of vegetables. You'll see a lot of variation. Some of the prices will probably be lower than you would like to charge; some of the others might be more than you had considered asking. Consider all of this information and then settle on prices that seem fair and satisfactory to

you. After your first week at the market, you'll have a better idea of whether you're asking too much or too little. If you sold out all of your produce in the first hour, then your prices might be too low. On the other hand, if you haven't sold much at all, your prices might be too high (or else you have really crummy produce, but you'll have to figure that one out for yourself).

PREPARING YOUR PRODUCE

Presentation is important. No one wants to purchase food that is unappealing to look at. For this reason, make sure that all of your produce is super-fresh and gently cleaned. Don't pull up your carrots from the garden and toss them in a basket to sell, covered with scraggly roots and dirt. Take a few moments to brush or wipe each one clean, then trim the extra roots. These small steps will help make your vegetables more appealing to customers and will likely result in extra sales for you. Small details make a difference.



Pricing your vegetables can be difficult. Take some time to compare prices at other farmers' market vendors. Are their vegetables priced much higher or lower than yours?





You can price your vegetables by weight, as shown here, or simply by number—tomatoes, two for \$1.00, for instance.

FARM STANDS

Maybe you don't have a local farmers' market—or maybe you do, but getting to it once a week just isn't feasible during the busy summer months. Then again, maybe you don't need a farmers' market: You might be able to set up a roadside farm stand on your own property.

There are a couple of caveats. First of all, people have to be able to find you. If your farm is in a remote location, the daily traffic going past your home is probably negligible, and the number of potential customers is likely even smaller. You don't want your harvest to get shriveled and inedible waiting for customers who never arrive. However, if you live in a populated area with good visibility, then a farm stand may be just the ticket to selling some of your excess produce.

Another consideration: the legalities. Some county and town zoning ordinances prohibit even the part-time sale of farm products from a roadside stand on your property. Consult your town code of ordinances to make sure that your farm stand is not infringing on any regulations.

Once you've cleared those two hurdles, it's time to consider the logistics of your farm stand. Signage is just as important as it is with a farmers' market, so be sure that your signs are effective and clear, with good color contrast and visibility. Make a few decisions about the frequency with which you will operate your stand. Will it be open every Saturday? Every Monday? Every morning? Will you personally man the booth, or will you leave the produce with a cash box on the honor system? These are questions that you and your family will have to answer before beginning your endeavor.



You may be able to ask higher prices for rare or unusual varieties, such as these red Dragon heirloom carrots.



The picture of cleanliness! These tomatoes are just asking to be purchased. They're shiny and clean and simply appetizing.



A farm stand can be a great way to market your produce without leaving home.





CHAPTER 9

ENJOYING YOUR HARVEST

IN THIS SECTION

- Heirloom Tomato Salad 161
- Apple Blackberry Crisp 162
- Roasted Vegetables 163
- Zucchini Bread 164

Gardening and cooking go hand in hand. There are many delightful treats that you can

prepare with the produce from your vegetable garden. Even if cooking isn't something that typically piques your interest, you'll want to experiment as the harvest rolls in. We've gathered a few recipes that anyone can enjoy preparing. These four recipes are simple and delicious, and they utilize the vegetables and fruits that you've harvested. You'll enjoy making these classic dishes for years to come.

A beautiful sight—a kitchen counter filled with fresh garden vegetables! Shutterstock



HEIRLOOM TOMATO SALAD

- 6 medium heirloom tomatoes
- salad dressing or extra-virgin olive oil, to taste
- 3 heirloom sweet peppers (*optional*)
- 1 heirloom cucumber (*optional*)
- 1 onion (*optional*)
- Serves 4

The fun of this salad is that it's never the same twice. As the season progresses, the varieties that compose these salads evolve, but they're always colorful, always interesting, and always delicious.

In the early summer, we rely on the trustworthy, early-producing Stupice variety, intermixed with the first Mexico Midgets and Beam's Yellow Pears. As the weeks pass, we begin adding more color, via the dusky purple Cherokee Purples, the rosy German Pinks, and the zesty Green Zebras.

To make your own salad, begin with freshly picked heirloom tomatoes. Medium and large tomatoes should be chopped into small pieces; cherry tomatoes can be tossed in without cutting. Chill before serving, and add the salad dressing of your choice as desired. Alternately, you can toss the tomatoes with a touch of extra-virgin olive oil. It's simple, easy, and ever-so-good.

If you also have heirloom sweet peppers or cucumbers ready at the same time, by all means, add them in as well. A bit of onion is another excellent addition. These extra flavors and textures make your heirloom salads even better—but if all you have ready at the moment are tomatoes, never fear; they can stand on their own, very well in fact.

We know what you're thinking: "But I only planted hybrid tomatoes! Can I still make the salad?" Of course! Absolutely. We just happen to like the varying colors and flavors of heirlooms.

