

ISL S3 E11: Food Preservation

Bashey and Andy Webb

FF: What are these, by the way, I've been meaning to ask you? What are these hanging on the wall here?

BW: Them's leather britches beans.

FF: Now what are they again? I've never seen that.

laughter

BW: Leather britches beans. I make 'em every year.

AW: You take them--she dries 'em that way. Just strings 'em on the thread when they're green and dries 'em thataway. You take them off that thread, put 'em in a pot of water, kind of scald 'em, throw a good hunk a meat in with 'em, and cook. Now there's somethin' good to eat.

FF: They're good? I've never had it. They're leather britches? Why do they call them that?

BW: Leather britches beans.

FF: Why do they call them that?

BW: I don't know.

FF: I guess that's easier than canning them or something, isn't it?

BW: Oh yes, they won't spoil.

FF: And they're just as good? They're--

BW: I'd rather have them as to have canned beans.

FF: I never had that, I'm gonna have to try that sometime. You don't have to do anything to 'em, just string 'em up?

BW: Yeah, just take your string off and put your string on.

FF: And how do you cook 'em?

BW: You just put 'em in the pot and parboil 'em a little and take 'em off of the thread and put 'em in your pot and cook.

Granny Gibson

FF: June 15, 1983. Granny Gibson.

GG: We used to take green beans and dry them and make what they called leather britches out of 'em.

FF: How would you do that?

GG: Well, you--we used to string 'em up on the string and hang 'em up and they'd dry. And then, whenever they dried 'em, in the winter time, you'd put 'em in your pot and your meat in with them and cook 'em a long time. They called 'em leather britches. They was good.

FF: Did you can a lot?

GG: I used to, did.

FF: You don't do much canning?

GG: I don't.

FF: What do you do, freeze it?

GG: Freeze it.

FF: I don't guess there's any special--did you have any special way of canning?

GG: Well, I have canned with the pressure cooker and I have canned with just cook it in a dishpan or whatever and put it in the cans.

FF: I guess the important thing is to make sure that it's sealed.

GG: Yeah.

FF: Used to be before pressure cookers, how would you seal it? Would you put it in a--how would you seal the tops?

GG: They used to have old-timey zinc caps, zinc lids. And we used them before we got the new kind.

FF: How about cabbage?

GG: I make kraut out of cabbage.

FF: Alright now, I know it seems--everybody knows how, but how would you make kraut, for example?

GG: Just cut it up, we'd have a churn--they'd put a layer of cabbage and then put salt and then another layer and put salt until it got full and then we'd pour cold water on that. And set it back 'til it's kraut.

FF: How long did it take to set back?

GG: Oh, about three weeks I guess.

FF: Set it in a cool place?

GG: In a cool place. You have to weight it down or it comes up or something. We used to put a saucer and put a rag down in on top of it and put a rock--have it good and clean--and put a rock down on top of that and weighted it down.

FF: Packed?

GG: Have it packed down.

FF: I guess once it starts workin' or something--

GG: Yeah, it pulls to comin' up.

FF: That makes sense.

GG: Yeah, we weighted it down with a rock.

FF: That's pretty interesting. What about pickled beans?

GG: Well, you do them the same way. You cook 'em, you cook 'em 'til they're pretty tender. And then you pour 'em out and let 'em cool. We used to pour ours out on just a table and let 'em cool and then you pack 'em in a churn and do them the same way you do your kraut. Makes pickled beans.

FF: Do you have to can those pickled beans?

GG: Yeah, you can 'em after they get made. After they get made, then you can kind of heat 'em enough to get them hot and then can 'em.

FF: You do kraut that way too?

GG: Same way.

Mrs. Algie Norton

AN: You want to scald your jars--five gallons or any large vessel--and wash your cabbage and trim the outside leaves, until you get down to the white, firm cabbage. Then you chop 'em up real fine and pack about a, or you put a layer of salt--about a heaping tablespoon-full--and about that much of sugar in the bottom. Then you put in about a gallon of your cabbage and pack 'em down and keep fillin' one layer after another the same way, 'til you get your jar full. Press it down 'til juice comes up over it. Then you got to have somethin' to weight it down with. You take a saucer or anything that'll fit in your jar and put in there, then put you somethin' to weight it: a white flint rock if you wash it and boil it good first. You can put it on top of it and tie about two layers of cloth over it. Let it work; it can take from two to three weeks to work, get the right sourness. Then pack it in glass jars and put it in a hot water bath canner and let it come to a boil to seal it and it'll keep for a year or two.

FF: Do you put, you said when the water comes up over what, the cabbage?

AN: Yeah.

FF: And you put the saucer down in on top of the cabbage.

AN: You just put the layers down in there.

FF: And then you put the plate in on top of it, weight it down with a rock. And when do you put the cloth around?

AN: You put your rock on and then the cloth and tie it.

FF: The cloth on what?

AN: Over the top of the jar; there's got to be some air to get in.

FF: And then there was something about just preserving cabbage, just on the ground like?

AN: Well, people used to pull 'em up by the roots and spread them out in a ditch and throw the dirt up and make it a little higher than the ground. And then they put straw or hay over the ground and pull them cabbage up and bury 'em with heads up next to one end, then they laid the next heads on them roots and you could make as big a pack as you wanted to. And cover 'em with straw and throw dirt over them, and they'd keep most of the winter.

Jean Eller

FF: You believe in planting by the signs, don't you?

JE: Yes ma'am.

FF: What about cooking by the signs?

JE: Well, you can make jelly on the new of the moon and you'll have jelly a heap quicker than you will on the full of the moon.

FF: You'll have jelly when?

JE: Quicker. Your juice will jell quicker, make it on the new of the moon than it will on the big moon.

FF: Well.

JE: It will.

FF: Do you have anything else that you cook by the signs? Just your jelly?

JE: Well--

FF: What about canning? Beans?

JE: I just can 'em beans when I have 'em. When I got the beans, I can 'em.

Bessie Underwood

FF: This is Bit Carver. Me and Suzie Nichols are goin' to interview Bessie Underwood on gardening, holidays, hard times, weddin' and courtin' customs--oh everythin'. The date's June 18, 1975. You don't mind us tape recording, do you?

BU: No.

FF: How did you'uns store your food? Did you can it or?

BU: Well, back then, it was pickled and dried. I don't remember just when momma got her first fruit jars. And we just canned and pickled and dried. Momma dried apples. I've seen her dry sweet potatoes. And we used to dry pumpkin. And one year she dried some okra.

FF: Was it good?

BU: Well, I guess I don't exactly remember whether it was good or not. I know I ate some of it, I just don't remember.

Harriet Echols

FF: How did you start saving the vegetables and stuff?

HE: Well, when they got, when they had to start with, to have the potatoes, you know, just for the home use. And then mother'd have another patch of beans, but when the cornfield beans come, she started in on the cabbage patch. She made kraut and they'd pickle corn and beans and make kraut and then they gathered their parsnips and carrots and turnips and both the sweet potatoes and irish potatoes. We had peas and soup beans--we raised soup beans to have for supply. And then at the old place, there was all kinds of fruits. I mean, apples for different seasons, and there were plums, peaches. And she dried apples then to go with the garden vegetables. And then, as the vegetables got ready to can--we didn't know what canning was then--mother had barrels that you pickled beans and made the kraut, you know, like we do now. I guess you all know how to make kraut. And we had, there wasn't any cans--any glass cans like we have now, jars--and we raised everything. We had chickens, we had cows, we had our homegrown milk and butter. We had our eggs and chickens to kill. Always raised our own pork at home.

John Freemon

JF: And as I started to tell you about their food, they didn't have any refrigeration at'all, but they put their stuff, their milk and butter and their eggs and dried foods--there wasn't many fruit jars. Dried food was the practical, that's the most food they had, you know. And shelled beans, dried beans, things like that. They had no green beans--and they also pickled. They had a way of pickling them. And bleaching, they took brimstone and--have you ever seen any? It's a bar of stuff, it's just like sulphur, but it's made in a bar and it'll burn. And they'd have the same smoke that sulphur does. And they'd peel 'em a great big tub half full of fruit--apples or peaches or anything they wanted to bleach. They'd sometimes bleach beans, green beans. And they'd put a piece of that stuff--put a little fire and ashes in a saucer or something and then they'd put a piece of that old brimstone in there, and put it right down in there and then they'd put something over it. And you know, it never would spoil. It'd just keep on and on. And it tasted a little bit like sulphur, but it was fresh. It was like a good green apple in the winter time. And that's the way they preserved their food. I can remember when mother only had twelve glass fruit jars. And we was proud of them.