

*Click, snap, or sometimes, thunk*--the sounds of the season. These are pleasant noises to those of us who are busy preserving food for the winter. They tell us that our mason jars have sealed, a necessary act if the food we have canned is to keep for future consumption. Many people have the idea that home canning is a relic of bygone days, but that is not true in our neighborhood. And, looking at the food preservation shelves in the area stores leads one to believe that perhaps canning is actually increasing in popularity. Little cardboard boxes of jar lids--a dozen to a box--are piled high, and new mason jars are available in almost any grocery store.

Here at Coe Creek, the shelves of the fruit cellar are filled a little at a time. Since there are just the two of us, I can mostly in pint jars, a strange sight to someone putting up food for a large family. But, I'd rather have a meal-sized amount of food in one can, and a pint of peaches, beans, or plums is just enough for us.

Just now, I have been busy with applesauce, peaches, and tomatoes. We have had a lot of cool weather, and fruits are taking their time ripening, but a few jars at a time add up. Today, I boiled a canner full--eight pints--of sliced peaches. While they cooked, I peeled and sliced a pail full of apples--enough when cooked to make seven or eight pints. I canned the applesauce, too, and all the jars gave me that satisfying *snap* indicating that the sauce was safely sealed in its glass container.

In the garden I have been watching the progress of the black beans. They got off to a slow start, and there was a time when I worried that there would be none at all ready by fall. But now, things look a lot more promising. If the beans have time to ripen fully by the first hard frost, I will shell them and store them as dry beans to cook this winter. But, if they are not completely ripe, I will have to can them as "shell beans." They will look similar to the canned black beans one can buy in a grocery store. They are handy for chili or soup when I am in a hurry to get a meal together. So, whether the beans fully ripen or not, we will have a supply for the winter.

If I do can shell beans--black, Swedish brown, or white beans--I will use the pressure canner. Both for safety and convenience, beans and

other low-acid foods must be preserved under pressure.

When we make sauerkraut, which we will shortly start, we can that as well. It is just as good in the freezer, but a jar of sauerkraut is much more convenient. We save freezer space for those vegetables that aren't as tasty when canned. We freeze broccoli, cauliflower, snap peas, and spinach.

Another main food storage area in addition to the freezer and the fruit cellar is the root cellar. Here we keep mostly potatoes and onions. Hardly a day goes by without potatoes on our plates in some form or another. I think if I had to exist for a long time on just one food, it would be that humble tuber. We love potatoes, and we eat them nearly every day. There is no more versatile vegetable, either. Boiled, baked, scalloped, fried, roasted, mashed--these usual methods of cooking potatoes, good as they are, aren't the only ways to use potatoes. There are entire books dedicated to potato recipes.

So, in spite of weeds in the garden and some pest that is taking bites out of many tomatoes, it looks as if, once again, we will have enough food put away for winter. If we had to depend on the supermarket for all of our food needs, I would be very distressed. We want to know where our food comes from, how it is grown, the conditions under which people work to produce it, how far it has been transported, and how fresh it is. So, the best way to fulfill these requirements is to grow and preserve as much of our food as possible ourselves. Mason jars and lids, freezers, and the root cellar help us to accomplish this.