



Tips to preserve a bumper harvest

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

ISLESBORO — In Maine gardens, August is the height of the growing season, with good — or lucky — gardeners drowning in oceans of ripening tomatoes, buckets of green beans and overflowing baskets of zucchini and summer squash.

August also is a busy month, with free time a precious resource. So what are good, easy ways to preserve the bounty of the summer harvest to enjoy in the fall and winter? Islesboro food historian, writer and long-time Bangor Daily News cooking columnist Sandy Oliver has as many ideas as she has vegetables waiting to be processed in her kitchen.

What's the first consideration for gardeners interested in preserving the harvest?

First of all, you have to think about what it is you like to eat. Don't even bother to preserve anything that you don't regularly eat. If you do, it will just sit there forever.

I really like tomatoes but feel unsure about making and canning tomato sauce. What else can I do?

If you like to cook tomatoes, one of the easiest things to do is throw a bunch of [raw] tomatoes into a plastic bag and put them in the freezer. In the wintertime, you fish them out, thaw them, throw them into the pot and there you are. It's as easy as it comes. Nothing tastes exactly like it does when it first comes off the vine, but it's certainly better than your average store-bought January tomato. That's not hard to beat, so that's an easy one.

What about green beans, which are ripening faster than they can be picked, it seems.

I usually blanch mine for about a minute. I snap them into the length I like to cook with and put them into boiling water for about a minute. I drain them and freeze them on cookie sheets before I put them into the freezer bag. Blanching stops the enzyme action. It kills the beans. Vegetables are alive until we cook and eat them. Blanching just stops the maturing process. Everything else goes into the cellar and keeps on trying to grow. It may slow way down in the winter, but there's something in every vegetable that seems to know spring is on the way.

Well, what's the best way to keep the vegetables in the cellar edible?

I think people should keep in mind when preserving food that with an awful lot of food, nothing else needs to happen to it other than being put away in a proper environment. If you've got root vegetables, it's good to put them in a
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Heather Omand and her husband, Tyler Omand, work with the patterns in the ecosystem around their Omand's Organics farmstead in Greenbush. They shape their land, grow vegetables, and raise ducks, chickens and guinea fowl following permaculture standards. The method promotes maintenance of agricultural ecosystems in a sustainable way.

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'In a partnership with the land'

Greenbush homestead flourishes with the help of permaculture

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Heather Omand, wearing a straw hat to protect against the hot summer sun, crouched down to pick up a handful of rich soil from the long raised-bed gardens behind her house in Greenbush.

"It smells so sweet," she said of the black, crumbly earth.

A few years ago, if anyone had picked up a handful of dirt from the property, it would have looked more like dry gravel — unlikely to support the vegetables, berries, herbs, chickens and ducks that now thrive at Omand's Organics. That's the permaculture farm Heather Omand and her husband, Tyler, are proud to have built on the steep-sloped property that previously was most notable for its plain modular home and erosion lines that ran downhill to the forest below.

When they found the property in 2008, it didn't seem too promising for agriculture — but it was affordable, and located close enough to commute to the University of Maine in Orono, where they were students. Tyler Omand, now 31 and a certified permaculture designer, was interested in permaculture and felt they were up to the challenge of turning 2.1 acres of marginal land into a rich,



A family of ducks roams freely at the home of Heather Omand and her husband, Tyler Omand, in Greenbush recently.

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Heather Omand harvested a variety of herbs and roots from her Greenbush farm.

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productive property — and that they could do it without an overreliance on fossil fuels, commercial fertilizer or human labor.

"Traditional agriculture is energy-intensive and conventional agriculture is fossil-fuel intensive," he said. "Permaculture is design-intensive. It's not necessarily stewarding the land, it's working in a partnership with the land. I've always wanted to be a homesteader, and when I discovered permaculture as a system in place

to do that, it blew me away."

According to Lisa Fernandes, the director of the Portland-based Maine Resilience Hub, permaculture design is an ecological design method and a set of techniques for building sustainable and resilient human habitats.

"It tries to mimic natural processes and patterns," she said Thursday. "It's often used in food production systems, but it goes beyond that. It performs multiple

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ABOUT A BARN

Craft beer barn in Skowhegan ingrained in equine past

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

SKOWHEGAN — The 15-year-old barn on Bigelow Hill embodies a family's evolution. Built as a stable to house their horses, it went up in three weeks. Like an old-school barn raising, several family members pitched in.

"I told my husband he had to build me a barn for my horses," Pam Powers, a former middle school teacher who rode recreationally, said.

"At the height of our craziness, we had seven horses," said Jeff Powers, her husband, who built the barn with his father.

That was then. Now that barn has a new purpose for the Powers family. For the past year and a half, their backyard barn has housed one of the fastest growing micro brewer-

ies in central Maine: Bigelow Brewing Co.

"It's a unique structure. We tried to keep a lot of its past intact," Jeff Powers, the company's head brewer, said. "It's not just a four-wall brewery. A barn lends well to comfort."

A homebrewer since 1989, Jeff Powers always knew he would open a brewery. When the horses, which his daughter Jordan also rode in high school, were sold, the barn suffered empty nest syndrome. It was idle

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Bigelow Brewing Co. in Skowhegan is a new brewery in a 1999 barn originally built for animals. Owned and operated by Jeff and Pamela Powers, the brewery makes five varieties of beer.