A Connection to Our Food – From Seeds to Canning

Julene Reese

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What gives people a feeling of power? An anonymous author wrote, from least to most important: money, status and growing a tomato.

For those who grow their own produce, there is a personal sense of pride and satisfaction that comes from planting, nurturing, harvesting and preserving. For those who don’t or can’t garden, Utah is home to an abundance of local producers, and supporting them and purchasing from farmers markets and community-supported agriculture programs brings about the same result of having delicious, healthy, fresh food. It also fosters a sense of community by supporting local producers.

Now more than ever, people are interested in obtaining or growing their own food supply and preserving it for the future.

Gardening

For those who need tips on gardening, whether at the beginning of the season or the end, Utah State University Extension’s website, garden.usu.edu, is full of resources to help you have your best yard and garden yet – even if you’ve struggled in the past. The website includes links to the Gardener’s Almanac with a checklist of month-by-month gardening tasks, a listing of online gardening courses developed by USU faculty, who, collectively have thousands of hours of research, the Utah’s Gardening Experts Facebook group, the Gardening Tips Podcast, a video library and information on the Master Gardener Program. You will also find information on water-efficient landscaping, pest management, apps, advice and more. Nearly any question you might have about gardening will be addressed in this large bank of research-based information. In addition is Extension’s new drought website at drought.usu.edu with resources and tips for water conservation.

Farmers Markets

For those who prefer to support and enjoy the fruits of others’ labors, farmers markets are a wonderful place to visit and shop. Supporting local producers by buying local food and products helps strengthen the local economy, creates local jobs and increases food security. It also helps preserve farms, ranches, small businesses and farmland, ensuring that Utah has farms and ranches for generations to come.

Visit Utah’s Own for a general listing of farmers markets around the state. The website will also help you find and support local producers, learn more about the farm-to-fork process and understand the rigorous food safety protocols for the local food supply. Also included are FAQs and tips to help support local producers.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Since many areas in Utah do not have access to local farmers markets, community supported agriculture is a way for citizens to directly support farmers in their communities. Members purchase a share of a farm’s produce for the growing season. Shareholders pay their money upfront, then typically receive a weekly delivery of what is in season and available at that farm. Benefits include reduced transportation costs, a varied diet from a local source and a direct, positive impact on communities. Click here for more information on community supported agriculture.

Preserving the Harvest

Once you have your produce in hand, you will likely have more than you can eat before it spoils. This is where food preservation comes in – enabling you to enjoy the harvest year-round. Fruits and vegetables, jams and jellies, pie filling, jerky, salsa and other produce items can be preserved through freezing, dehydration and pressure canning.

When canning and using other methods of food preservation, safely preserving it with scientifically tested recipes should be the top priority. No one wants to waste their time and effort preserving food that will spoil before consumption, not seal properly or create an accidental food-borne illness or toxin in the product. Also, be aware that recipes passed down through families and neighbors or found on Google searches may not be safe.
Trusted food preservation resources include:

* USDA’s Complete Guide to Home Canning, which provides a free e-book download. The information is based on research conducted by the National Center for Home Food Preservation in cooperation with USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

* The Ball Canning Company website provides recipes, tips on canning and information about products, services and support.

* The Extension canning resources website includes research-backed information on preserving the harvest, food preservation fact sheets and the master food preserver program. Visit canning.usu.edu Though the harvest only lasts for a season, the need to eat does not. The more we learn about and become connected to our food supply, the greater our ability to provide for, strengthen and nourish our families and communities.

Writer: Julene Reese, 435-757-6418, Julene.Reese@usu.edu