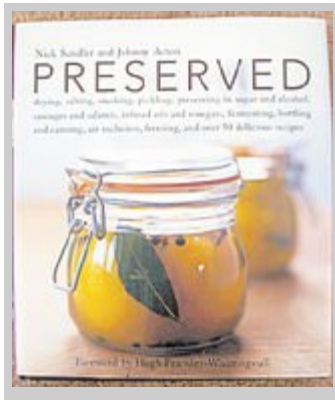


'Preserved' offers international look at keeping food

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For The Daily Press

Now's the time to be putting food by — taking the pick of the season and preserving it for the coming winter. It wasn't so long ago that we did not have the luxury of finding every possible foodstuff in the grocery store whenever we got a hankering for it. There are good reasons to go back to the way of our mothers and put up our local garden excess for use later. For one, the taste is at its best when food is allowed to ripen on the vine, being picked at its prime. Two, there's nutritional evidence that such food feeds out bodies better. Vitamins and other components of food we are just beginning to appreciate — lycopene, anthocyanins, indoles, and others — are most present in fully ripe food. Three, there's an environmental cost to bringing

strawberries from Chile, apples from New Zealand, and green beans from Argentina. And four, it seems increasingly that we need to be concerned with food safety. When we know who grows our food, and where and how they do it, we can be more confident that there are no strange additives or toxic residues.

I love all the fruit available in this area. So far this summer, I've dehydrated lots of strawberries and cherries. Blueberries and raspberries are coming up. I find they're better frozen than dried. Rhubarb has found its way into both the freezer and the dehydrator. Herbs are really easy to dry. I've also started my winter stock of kale. Again, I like to dehydrate it.

If you've not had much experience in, or even given much thought to preserving food, you'll enjoy reading "Preserved" by Nick Sandler and Johnny Acton. These two British friends have a good time weaving in stories about their experiences with information on how to carry out a variety of preserving methods: drying, salting, smoking, pickling, fermenting, canning, freezing and more. Some of their methods are different from the ones most commonly used in this country.

The variety of methods in this book is impressive. There's a section on making various pastes — Thai red and green pastes, rending curry paste, pest, sun-dried tomato paste, tapenade, adobo. Infused oils and vinegars are included too. The jams and jelly section goes beyond the basics and includes plum sauce, chile sauce, mincemeat and crystallized violets. And the sausages section has at least four nationalities represented.

The soil in my garden is still being built up and I often get small onions — I'm going to try this recipe with some of them.

Pickled Onions

The key to success is to use tiny onions and to make sure the vinegar is sweet enough.

3 pounds small pickling onions

1/4 cup sea salt or kosher salt

Several cloves

Several blades of mace

1-2 fresh chiles, cut in half

2 cups sugar

5 cups white wine vinegar

Trim the tops and bottoms off the onions, but don't overdo it or they will disintegrate in their pickle. Leaving the skins still on, pour boiling water over them and let them blanch for 20 seconds. Then tip out the hot water, cover with cold water, and peel them under the water. This will prevent the surfaces oxidizing and toughening up.

Layer the onions in a clean bowl, and sprinkle each layer with salt as you go. Cover with a clean cloth and leave overnight. The

salt will draw out much of the onions' moisture, ensuring a desirable crunch.

Next day, rinse them well and dry them as thoroughly as possible. Place them in sterilized jars (Wash in soapy water, rinse thoroughly, then immerse in boiling water for 10 minutes, then dry in a cool or recently switched off oven. Ditto lids, seals and funnels.) with two cloves, a blade of mace, and half a chile each.

Boil up the sugar and vinegar for one minute, then pour the hot liquid over the onions. Seal the jars and wait two to three weeks before eating. They will keep for at least six months.

Preserved was published by Kyle Books and lists at \$29.95. Abebooks.com copies start at \$8.30.

This column is sponsored by FEAST (Food security, Education, Access, Sustainable agriculture, and Traditions), a coalition of local organizations and individuals devoted to getting fresh, healthy, local food on our plates. If you have a cookbook you'd like to review or have reviewed in this column, please contact Becky McDowell (715) 682-4031 or beckymcd@visi.com.