Preserving Pears

Pears can be preserved by canning, freezing, or drying. They also star in specialty jams, butters, relishes and chutneys!

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The natural sweetness of dried pears makes them a tasty high energy snack. Although canning is preferred, full-flavored pears that are crisp and firm can be frozen. Pears can be canned in flavored juices, made into specialty jams or preserves, and star in relishes and chutneys. There are even recipes for salsa with pears.

Judging Ripeness of Pears

- Following harvest, pears need to ripen for several days to several weeks depending upon variety.
- Judge ripeness by pressing lightly at the stem end of the pear; it will give slightly. If you wait until the pear yields to pressure around the body of the pear, it will be past its prime.

Peeling Pears

- A melon baller or metal measuring spoon makes removing the cores easy and gives a uniform appearance.
- Prevent discoloration of the peeled pears by holding them in a solution made by crushing six 500mg vitamin C tablets (or 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid) in one gallon water or use a commercial ascorbic acid mixture.
- Drain pears well before canning or freezing.

Canning Pears

- Bartlett pears are considered the best for canning.
- Remember hot packing pears produces a better-quality canned product than pears put into the jar raw.
- Pears can be canned in complementary fruit juice such as apple juice, white grape juice, or pineapple juice.
- A cinnamon stick may be added to each jar. This is especially tasty with pears canned in apple juice.

Caution: **Asian pears are lower in acidity and must be acidified by adding 1 tablespoon bottled lemon juice per pint or two tablespoons lemon juice per quart.**

What Causes Canned Pears to Turn Dark

- Pears have been packed into jars raw.
- Although a pear is solid and we don't think of it containing air, all fruits contain air. When the fruit it heated, that air is forced out and the fruit shrinks. If pears are cooked in canning syrup or other liquid, the air is forced from the pear before it goes into the jar.
- The processing time was too short to inactivate enzymes. Under processing results in dark pears.
- Enzymes in pears cause discoloration when exposed to air.
- If the pears are packed into the jars raw and then covered with syrup, the air will be released into the jar and the headspace will be greater after processing.
- Excess headspace allows more oxygen in the jar to cause the fruit to darken. This is usually more noticeable in the pears at the top of the jar.
- Liquid is lost from the jar as a result of siphoning. Siphoning contributes to more air in the jar and darker fruit. Hot pack the pears to reduce siphoning.

Freezing Pears

- Sugar helps to firm the pears. Heavier syrups produce a firmer product.
- Sugar is not needed for safety.
- Pears can be frozen in juice or water but will suffer cellular damage because they will freeze harder—like an ice cube.
- Add a color preserver to pears.
- Don't forget to allow room for the liquid in the pear container to expand. Follow headspace recommendations, otherwise, you may have a sticky freezer as contents overflow the container.
- A small piece of crumpled water resistant paper may be put on top of the fruit to hold the pears under the syrup.

Drying Pears

- Pears dry successfully in a dehydrator at 135-140°F.
- Pear slices can be oven dried if the oven temperature can be set as low as 150°F.
- Pre-treat the pears in a solution of ½ teaspoon of powdered citric acid in 2 cups water or equal parts bottled lemon juice and water for ten minutes before placing them on trays to dry. This reduces oxidation giving better color and enhances the destruction of potentially harmful bacteria.
- Blotting the slices with a paper towel before placing them on the dehydrator tray reduces the moisture to be removed.
- Drying time depends upon the thickness of the pieces, pre-treatment method, and method of drying.
- To test for dryness, cool several pieces and cut them in half. There should be no visible moisture and you should not be able to squeeze any moisture from the fruit. They should not be sticky or tacky.
- Cool fruit 30 to 60 minutes to remove all internal heat before packaging.
- Condition the fruit to equalize the moisture in each piece.
- Take the fruit that has cooled and pack it loosely in plastic or glass jars.
- Seal the jars and let them stand for 7 to 10 days.
- Shake the jars daily to separate the pieces and check the moisture condensation.
- If condensation develops in the jar, return the fruit to the dehydrator for more drying.
- Place in an airtight container to prevent rehydration during storage.