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Getting Ready for the Preserving Season

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Ah, the preserving season. Hush you say? It?s still snowing and/or raining cats and dogs you say. It?s still freezing out there in the morning and the buds are all but begging for a little sun. Yep, I feel you. This has been a chilly Spring (at least in the Pacific Northwest) but the preserving season is afoot even if it is a few months shy of full tilt.

Even though we are not at the place of canning pots and pickling crocks, it is the perfect time to start doing something that I write about in my book - A Householder?s Guide to the Universe. During these early days of Spring we would be well advised to do an inventory of what we put up last year, how much is left on our shelves and what, in the end, we need more of.

Did those delicious dilly beans fly off the shelf before the first of the autumn leaves arrived? Make mental note and add more to your to-do list. Did that peach chutney that you were sure everyone would love sit and languish on the shelf? Maybe its time to cross it off your list. Were the kids clamoring for more of your applesauce (?the store bought tastes so watery?) but the twelve quarts were gone in a flash? Really, checking out your pantry before the new season starts is a very helpful tool. It will separate out the winners from the losers and help you maximize your time during an otherwise busy harvesting season.

In my book I offer guides for creating a food preservation game plan. The information is no different then most of what our grandparents knew except they were not flying blind. They had parents or a community to teach them. They lived within a rural world. They watched the seasons with a hawk eye. They had to. The consequences of slacking would be felt dramatically. Which separates us from them. Excuse me for saying so but they were not nearly as precious about it. Nope, we tend to approach it like a hobby and get all pretty about it. Nothing wrong with that but some of the most locked and loaded pantries were anything but pretty. Cute hand-written labels and fancy fabric hats? Errrrr, not so much. No, for them it was real life. You either had it on your panty shelf or you most likely weren?t going to eat. No time for calligraphy in that world; at least not too often I suspect.

Of course few of us urban gardeners need to think of food quite so dramatically but the logic remains. Don?t put up what you will not eat. Being real with yourself and the effort is all important. Besides, with so much good stuff out there you should find something you really love. When, how, what and how much to put up is part of the information available to you in the book along with my own ?hit list? as I say. And while I don?t want you to stock your pantry the way I do, I do think a game plan will be your friend in the end. And no time like the present to start thinking about it.

Of course, I may be jumping ahead of myself in suggesting that you have last year?s pantry to consider. If this is your first year or if you are still needing to learn the basics I might suggest my dvd (forgive me please), Preserving with Friends. Honestly, I?m not an empire. I?m just a householder and kitchen gardener doing what the rest of you are -- trying to make sense of the world one carrot, pear, strawberry and can of applesauce at a time. Which is my way of saying the dvd is all about the step by step skills we need to put up

the harvest. In the end, the hope will be to turn our gardens and farms into beautiful and functional pantries. At least that?s the hope of this householder.

For more information about the dvd and/or the book you can visit either on facebook or on my website www.portlandpreserve.com [1] There is a trailer you can watch to see if it catches your fancy.

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