

Put 'em Up: a Comprehensive Home Preserving Guide for the Creative Cook

Sherri Brooks Vinton

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"Canning is the new knitting circle," claims Vinton, and if that is so, the benefits are many. Not only do home-preserved foods taste better than store-bought, they also maximize quality, minimize the use of chemical preservatives, save money, reduce reliance on food shipped (at great petroleum and environmental expense) from faraway locations, support local agriculture, and may even assist in furthering family food traditions.

In *Put 'em Up*, Vinton appeals to the new food hipster by providing basic information and recipes for a variety of likely concoctions. She excels at boiling down information into easy prose, providing the reasons why certain steps are important, and anticipating the questions that a beginner might have. Her emphasis is on making food preservation possible and fun, with no fancy ingredients and few single-use gadgets.

The first section of the book addresses technique and is further split into preparation methods and preservation methods. For each food preparation method, such as blanching or butters, Vinton explains its purpose, needed equipment, and key ingredients, then provides step-by-step illustrated instructions. For preservation methods—freezing, vinegars, drying, and boiling water among them—she again covers equipment and step-by-step instructions, but adds detail on particular processes within each method. In addition, she briefly discusses how one might divvy up tasks if working in a group of people (she predicts a happier outcome "cooking more batches, not bigger ones"), and distinguishes between "Things That Will Surely Get You into Trouble" (like botulism) and "Things That Look Bad but Aren't Dangerous" (like the scum that appears on fermented pickles).

The second section features recipes, organized by produce item, and includes a wide variety of treats from kimchi to raspberry jam. Her writing style is folksy, with ingredients such as "not-your-best brandy" and chatty introductions to beets and carrots. Color photographs illustrate the text, and icons indicating storage methods follow each recipe. Sidebars indicate how a preserve, such as mushroom confit, might be put into the service of another dish, such as a mushroom confit and goat cheese tart. While Vinton appreciates the economy of preserving foods, her focus is more clearly on taste, and the choice of recipes will appeal to readers who have had exposure to foods beyond 1950s' fare. While the apple butter, dilly beans, or fermented sauerkraut recipes may look familiar to traditionalists, Szechuan beans and cucumber sake will likely be new.

Vinton, author of *The Real Food Revival*, is involved in local agriculture and slow food efforts, and works to connect chefs and restaurateurs with growers. This book will help put new cooks in touch with a range of foods and possibilities and may even successfully expand the definition of hip.

TERESA SCOLLON (July / August 2010)

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