



# Old-school FOOD

You've heard of slow food. Now another movement is transforming what we eat, and it's all about preservation.

BY JAKE LEMKOWITZ FOR USA TODAY




#### RANDMAS OF THE WORLD, TAKE NOTE: OLD IS HOT RIGHT NOW.

From straight-razor barbershops to fixed-wheel bicycles, bygone traditions are being reclaimed and embraced by a modern generation. Perhaps the most delicious aspect of this trend is the return of old-school food-preservation techniques such as canning and pickling.

Imagine a kitchen cabinet bursting with jars of every shape and color: vibrant rows of red

tomatoes, golden applesauce, and purple beets floating in liquid. This beautiful sight is becoming familiar in kitchens across the country, as home cooks are learning to make the most out of local peak-season produce by storing it for later.

Here are four food preservation methods of yore that will allow you to do something different with that annual farmers' market glut. Stock up your pantry and refrigerator, and get rewarded with delicious goodies all year long.

A collage of fresh produce including tomatoes, onions, and jars of home-canned goods. The background is a soft-focus image of various vegetables. In the foreground, several glass jars with metal lids are filled with a reddish-orange substance, likely canned tomatoes or sauce. The overall color palette is warm and natural, dominated by reds, oranges, and yellows.

## HOME CANNING

When did following old-fashioned traditions become so extreme? It's one thing to sport a handlebar mustache. But growing one so that you can look extra authentic playing barehanded baseball with 19th-century rules while wearing an all-wool uniform in August is taking things a bit far.

Canning your own food, by contrast, strikes the perfect balance. It makes good practical sense and allows home cooks to stretch their imaginations in the kitchen. There's also a spiritual element to it, notes Marisa McClellan, canning connoisseur and author of the food blog *foodinjars.com*. "Canning appeals to me because it is a hopeful act. When you can, you assume that life will go on."

The concept behind the science is simple: Seal food in a clean environment without air and the food can last for a very long time. It takes some special equipment—either a boiling-water or pressure canner—to create a shelf-stable seal on a jar, but this equipment comes pretty cheap. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's *Complete Guide to Home Canning* is a great primer on canning's technical side and is available free on the Internet.

The key to canning is to get inspired by ingredients. Wander farmers' markets, talk to friends with gardens, and keep an eye out for ingredients hitting their season. You'll be happy you did when you're eating October's homemade apple butter in February.

## THIS AIN'T YOUR MAMA'S CANNED TUNA

Home canning isn't just for fruits and vegetables. Say you happen to be out on a fishing trip, and you reel in a 700-pound tuna. Or maybe you just get a good deal on at your local fish market. Either way, too much tuna is definitely a good thing because canning your own is more than just preserving. It's crafting food with the kind of deep flavors that you could never get any other way. Supermarket canned tuna gets a bad rap, but this is definitely not that tasteless mashed-up stuff. This is luxurious tuna in olive oil that is a

sophisticated world away from tuna fish sandwiches.

Cut your tuna into chunks, cover it with olive oil in a pot, and cook it on the lowest possible simmer. You want to gently poach the fish. While it is cooking, add rosemary, peppercorns, fennel seeds, the rind of a lemon, and fresh garlic. After 45 minutes, it's ready. Can it and enjoy. The French use it for *salade Niçoise*, the Spanish stuff it into peppers for *tapas*, and the Italians are known to eat it right out of the jar. You will too.

## PICKLING

For anyone who's ever been disappointed in the nonexistent flavor of a store-bought pickle, this one's for you.

With a good vegetable hook-up and an experimental attitude, you can make pickles that will turn out better than anything you've ever found in the supermarket. To the ears of the initiated, the sour, garlicky crunch of a homemade dill pickle is like music. Cheap, beautiful music. You don't need any canning equipment, and you don't need to do anything special to the jars to make them shelf stable.

And pickling isn't limited to cucumbers—try one of three variations on the 4,000-year-old foodstuff below: cucumbers, eggs, or peppers.

### ALL-AMERICAN

The all-American refrigerator pickle of your dreams is within reach. It's all about the brine. You can slice, spear, or julienne your cucumbers, but it's the brine that determines a pickle's true character.

A good base recipe to start with is 2 quarts each of water and white vinegar, and half cup of salt. Bring this to a boil, and it's done. If you like a sweeter pickle, you can add sugar, but the real flavor comes from what you choose to put in the jars with your cucumbers: cloves of garlic, peppercorns, dill, ginger, red pepper flakes, mustard seed, cinnamon sticks, or whatever else you can imagine. The possibilities are endless. Pour brine over the cucumbers and other ingredients, and seal the jars. After a week in the refrigerator, your delicious pickles are ready to eat.

### POOR MAN'S CAVIAR

Huge glass jars of pickled eggs bobbing in their brine like some sort of eerie science experiment have frightened the patrons of British pubs for years but are becoming increasingly scarce. Which is too bad, because if you've ever tasted the food known as poor man's caviar, you know that it's a delicious bar snack and a fantastic accompaniment to a pint of beer.

Pickling's the perfect panacea when you find yourself overwhelmed with an abundance of ultra fresh eggs. To add a psychedelic Easter accent, include red beet juice in your standard pickle brine, which will stain the eggs a bright pink hue. The eggs will keep in your refrigerator for six months. Cheers!

### PETER PIPER PERFECTION

Tongue twisters aside, pickled peppers rule. There's very little that these spicy little torpedoes don't make better, especially Mexican food. Either eaten whole or chopped up and added to fresh salsa, they are a secret ingredient to achieving a taqueria-level taco at home.

Mexican oregano and coriander seeds are a nice addition to your basic brine. Start with jalapeños, and if you can handle the heat, add a few habañeros. Slice slits in the chilies and fry them in a pan for about 10 minutes. Put them in jars with brine, and they'll keep for two months in the fridge. Sliced radishes add a nice color contrast and a refreshing textural snap.





TRY IT!  
MAKE A  
TART AND  
SWEET  
RASPBERRY  
SHRUB

## SHRUBS

(NOT THE KIND YOU THINK)

Channel your inner mixologist with a shrub, a simple mixture of fruit, sugar, and vinegar in a 1:1:1 ratio, lightly aged and strained. The result is a tart and sweet syrup that is the ticket to one-of-a-kind drinks and desserts and keeps up to a year in the refrigerator.

Besides being a fun word to say, a shrub is incredibly versatile and easy to make with any combination of fruit and vinegar. Strawberries and balsamic vinegar. Nectarines and Champagne vinegar. The only limit is your imagination.

Shrubs were popular in colonial America for their ability to make harsh rum more palatable. Today's bartenders are taking a cue from the past by using shrubs as a key cocktail component. A few tablespoons add a fresh acidic tang to any drink, creating a sophisticated, homemade twist.

Use a peach shrub to craft the world's greatest Bellini or a shrub made with local blueberries for a gin and tonic that captures the taste of summer. It's just as easy to create nonalcoholic sodas by mixing the fruit syrup into sparkling water. Seltzer poured over half an ounce of plum ginger shrub will put your supermarket cola to shame. For dessert, drizzle over vanilla ice cream, pound cake,

or anything that needs a blast of piquant flavor. Introduce yourself to the party animals in the world of fruit preserves. Jelly only wishes it were this cool.

Bringmeashrub.blogspot.com, a blog



ALL YOU  
NEED IS  
VINEGAR,  
FRUIT, AND  
SUGAR

exclusively about shrubs, is an excellent recipe source, featuring flavor creations such as pineapple-habanero-coconut. Creator Alex Kern says, "Shrubs are really a logical extension of what we've

already seen in terms of this sort of modern preservation movement that is happening at the moment. I think with the hectic pace of modern life, people are sort of trying to find analog activities to do in a digital world."

The secret to shrubs' eye-popping flavor is the balance between sweet and tart elements, so there is no better place to start than with classic raspberry, which naturally features both. Think of this as the master shrub recipe. You can substitute any fruit for the raspberries and any other vinegar for the red wine variety.

Thoroughly mix a pound of fresh raspberries with a pound of brown sugar in a big jar and allow this to macerate in the fridge overnight. The next day, you'll see that the raspberries will have released a lot of juice. Add 16 ounces of red wine vinegar, and let this sit in your refrigerator for a week while the flavors dance and develop. Now is the time to add any optional ingredients you might desire. For instance, with raspberry shrub, try throwing a handful of pink peppercorns into the mix. Agitate the jar every day or so. When the week-long wait is finally over, strain out the solids, and bottle what is left. Your shrub is ready. That's it. The fruit's bright flavor will shine through, sweet and sour and lively. Now add a few spoonfuls to some rum or club soda, and you are ready to drink like it's 1776.