

Extreme Canning: The Pickle Lady Reigns

If home canning was a competition, Henri Truh would be a rock star. Last year the 91-year-old canned more than 900 quarts of dill pickles, plus hundreds of quarts and pints of other pickled vegetables, relishes, and salsas. In the fall, she hand-peeled 10 bushels of apples and canned them for pies she'll make this summer for the De Smet Farmers Market and for an annual community event. She even renders the lard for her homemade pie crusts.

The Carthage, S. Dak., woman learned to can when she was 10 using a wood stove under the supervision of her mother. At 83, Truh turned her garage into a commercial kitchen that meets food safety certification requirements to can and sell her goods under the business name, Tru-d-lites.

Among the many variations of dill pickles, she makes stuffed dill pickles. Her son drills holes lengthwise through pickles, and she stuffs them with different kinds of hot peppers.

"They're hot, and my son and I don't eat them," Truh admits, "but they sell like hotcakes. They look pretty when you slice them up to serve them on a relish tray."

She measures pickles and ingredients so that the brine is consistent, and the flavor is the same in every jar. They sell for about \$5/quart, depending on current ingredient costs.

"They call me the Pickle Lady," Truh

laughs. "People tell me I should call them 'gourmet' and charge more."

Canning season officially begins in the spring with pickled asparagus (300 lbs. last year), then radishes, which turn white when pickled but make a beautiful red pickle juice. Canning peaks during the cucumber harvest and continues into early winter. Last year, Truh concocted "Golden Glow," a pumpkin sweet relish recipe. She pickles eggs and garlic all winter and makes a variety of jellies to stock up for the next farmer's market season. Hunters also contract with her to can their pheasants and venison.

Truh considers her commercial kitchen as an investment in a hobby, but canning is a real business and one she thinks others can make a living at, if they are willing to put in long hours and be dedicated to making quality products. Truh emphasizes the importance of putting up fresh produce. Typically, food she receives in the morning is in jars before the end of the day.

She offers some advice:

- Contact the health department to find out regulations for facilities and the classes and licenses required in your state.
- If you put out an excellent product, word of mouth advertising is all you will need.
- Use quality produce. Truh gets some from her son's garden, but buys most from the local Pearl Creek Hutterite Colony.
- Recruit others to watch for bargains.



Photos by Donna Palmund

Last year 91-year-old Henri Truh canned more than 900 quarts of dill pickles, plus hundreds of quarts and pints of other pickled vegetables, relishes, and salsas.

Friends and family buy canning jars at auction sales and lids when they go on sale. Truh buys lids by the case. She likes to have 50 gal. of 5 percent acidity white vinegar on hand at the beginning of each season.

• Take time to plan an efficient kitchen. "Build it twice as big as you think you'll need," Truh suggests, noting that her space is actually too small. She appreciates her 6-ft. stainless steel worktable and the low countertop stove, which makes it easier for her to handle jars and canning equipment. Wall ovens are also at a good height for the pies, cookies and other treats she bakes.

• Diversify. Truh keeps things interesting by trying new things or revising recipes such as her stuffed pickles and pickled miniature eggplants. Besides her pickled items, she sells baked goods and embroiders tea towels

popular with visitors to De Smet's Laura Ingalls Wilder Pageant gift shop.

This year, Truh plans to add something new to her product line. She and her oldest daughter are putting the finishing touches on a high-end cookbook of her recipes. They will help others reproduce her famous recipes and hopefully inspire readers as well.

"I keep telling people that recipes are only guidelines," Truh says.

Into her eighth decade of canning, she's not finished creating recipes and has no intention of quitting.

"My son always says, 'Mom is 91, but she doesn't know it yet,'" Truh laughs.

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RJW Automated Butternut Squash Peeler works similar to an apple peeler, handling squash from 4 1/2 to 22 in. long.

Peeler Adds Value To Butternut Squash

Anyone who has ever hand-peeled a Butternut squash can appreciate how helpful a motorized peeler can be — especially one that can easily peel three of them in a minute. At \$13,500, the RJW™ Automated Butternut Squash Peeler isn't a household item, but it may be a good investment for large acreage growers who want to add value to their squash crop.

Consumers often prefer packaged, peeled and chopped squash ready to cook as a side dish, in soup or for pie, says Ronald Widelo who invented the patented peeler about 12 years ago. The best butternut squash are sold whole, but value can be added to blemished squash by packaging them. The challenge is that commercial peelers on the market require water or air and cost \$75,000 or more.

Widelo's system peels dry, using a stainless steel 30 by 38-in. setup operated by a quiet 1/4-hp Baldor motor. It's similar to an apple peeler, and peels squash from 4

1/2 to 22 in. long. Peelings fall in a tote and make great livestock feed.

"It's simple to work on and maintain," Widelo says. "I send it set up and ready to peel, along with a video to show how to use it."

Widelo says more farmers are purchasing the peeler to increase profits with direct sales. They peel and prepare the squash and sell it to area restaurants, grocery stores and farmers markets.

"I sold one to a buyer in Cape Town, South Africa. It used to take him half a day to peel and cut up 500 lbs. of squash. Now he does it in half an hour," Widelo says.

The peelers are made in the U.S. and have a 1-year warranty. A video that shows how the peeler works and cleans up easily can be seen at www.farmshow.com. It also peels turnips.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, RJW Automated Butternut Squash Peelers, P.O. Box 155, North Hatfield, Mass. 01066 (ph 413 320-6195; www.butternutpeeler.com).



Gayal oxen are found in Burma and India. Because of their rarity, a 2-year-old pair sells for about \$12,000.

Exotic Oxen Rare In U.S.

If you like the idea of owning livestock that will amaze your friends and neighbors, a pair of Gayal oxen might just fit the bill. Because of their rarity, a 2-year-old pair sells for around \$12,000, according to Jurgen Schulz who runs the Kifaru Exotic Animal Auction House in Lampasas, Texas. He imported his Gayal oxen from Sweden many years ago. "They're interesting because they're so rare," Schulz says.

Gayal is a domestic gaur, the largest of the wild oxen, and the breed is common among hill tribes in Burma and India. Gayals forage in the wild during the day and are lured close to the villages at night. They aren't milked, but are butchered for meat.

Cows and bulls grow horns that are about 2 ft. wide. Gayals stand 55 to 63 in. tall at the shoulder. They have shorter legs and shorter, thicker horns than the wild gaur. They also lack the gaur's shoulder hump. Gayal bulls, however, maintain the wild mating call of the

gaur, which is as loud and resonant as the bass notes of an organ.

Schulz feeds his Gayal herd the same kind of hay and pellets he feeds his other cattle. They do well in the Texas climate and can handle temperatures down to about 15 degrees without shelter. In colder climates they would require shelter during the winter, he says.

Some livestock owners crossbreed them with cattle. They are gentle, though it's always wise to be careful around bulls and cows with new calves. Gayals have a 20-year life expectancy.

Schulz holds several exotic animals on his website including a Gayal pair up for sale.

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