



PREPARATION

Cost of Preserving and Storing Food no. 8.704

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Quick Facts...

Home food preservation saves money for some people. For others it may not save anything.

Costs to consider when figuring the economics of food preservation include: produce and ingredients, equipment and supplies, fuel consumption, capital outlays, time and energy, and the cost of similar food preserved commercially.

Freezing is simple and keeps food more like fresh produce than other preservation methods. However, a freezer is costly to purchase and operate.

One way to help manage rising food costs is with a garden hoe and canning jars. Home food preservation does save money for some people. For others, it may not. Costs to consider include produce and added ingredients, equipment and supplies, fuel consumption to preserve and store the foods, lost interest on large capital outlays such as a freezer, personal time and energy, and the cost of similar food preserved commercially.

Produce Costs

Produce used in home food preservation may come from several sources: home gardens, roadside markets, pick-your-own fields, or gifts from “green-thumb” family or friends.

If you purchase the produce, the cost is evident. If you have a garden, some costs to consider include the cost of the land; special costs to till the soil; the cost of such reuseable equipment as garden tools; the cost of non-reuseable items such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and water; and your time and energy.

The harvest value of your gardening efforts will depend on the market value of the food produced minus any costs incurred. If you produce a bumper crop, the savings may be great. However, if you’re plagued with crop failures, the savings may be small.

Although gardening may not be exceptionally profitable when you consider your time, it does offer many side benefits. In addition to the cash you don’t spend at the supermarket, you gain, through healthy outdoor exercise, opportunities for family activities, across-the-fence neighborliness and the pleasure of sharing extra produce with neighbors and friends. Other benefits include the ready availability of fresh garden produce without making a trip to the supermarket, that fresh-from-the-garden good taste, and the challenge and ecological satisfaction of growing some of your own food. (See table 6 for a worksheet on estimating produce costs.)

Freezing Costs

Freezing has advantages and disadvantages for food preservation. The two main advantages are that the procedure is simple and that it keeps food more like fresh produce than any other method of long-term preservation.

A disadvantage is the cost to buy and operate a freezer. If you already have one for convenience, freezing inexpensive sources of produce can be an economical way to provide a variety of high quality fruits and vegetables during out-of-season months. Also, home frozen foods can be preserved to your own taste or special diet needs.

Some costs associated with freezing food include:

- initial cost of freezer, divided over 20 years if new, nine years if used;

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