

PRESERVE THE BOUNTY - 2016



We live in Ohio. That comes with harsh winters, unpredictable springs, hot humid summers and long cool autumns. While we have a bounty of fresh produce available, the season for some items can be very short indeed. Strawberry season, for example, typically only last for one month! As a member of Fresh Fork Market, the food you get in your shares is harvested right when it should (not early and ripened artificially for long transport and storage), and so it's at the height of flavor and quality. So to really make the most of Ohio's bounty and enjoy it in the off season, you have to learn to put things away for later.

By using some of the tips and techniques that you will learn from this class, you can also make sure to use up your entire share even if you can't eat it all that week- freeze it, can it or ferment it for the winter!

Freezing

The quickest and simplest way to preserve food is to freeze it. While some products simply do not freeze well, with a little time and effort, most produce can be frozen and used later. Freezing usually changes a products texture, so don't expect to thaw a frozen tomato and slice it up for a sandwich. It will, however, make a great sauce.

Blanching

The term comes from the French word for *white* or *to whiten*, and it was originally a process for whitening clothes. Some chefs refer to the process as "shock the vegetables." What happens is that the vegetables undergo a rapid temperature change, from extremely hot to extremely cold, very quickly. This sudden change of temperature causes the vegetable to contract and preserve its nutrient density by inhibiting the ripening enzyme. Most noticeable in the process is the change in color: greens darken, broccoli brightens, and asparagus takes on beautiful shades of color.

In the case of tomatoes and peaches, blanching makes removing the skin quick and easy. Mark an "x" on the bottom of the fruit with a sharp knife. Drop it into boiling water. Remove from the boiling water after a given amount of time, and plunge into ice water. When it is completely chilled, remove from the ice water and the skin quickly peels off.

Foods not blanched before freezing:

- Berries – blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries
- Corn – you should not blanch the corn. It will lose flavor if blanched.
- Rhubarb

Almost all other vegetables should be blanched. Blanching stops the ripening enzymes and brightens the colors. Freezing slows the ripening process but doesn't completely stop it.

To get the most of your freezing efforts, follow some of these simple tips:

- Home freezer should be placed in a convenient place that is dry and well ventilated. Be sure to defrost at least once a year.
- If your produce is not in great condition, it will not hold up well and is not worth the effort to freeze it.
- Vegetables should be blanched to preserve quality.
- Fruits in syrup, stews, sauces or other liquidy products should be stored in rigid freezer containers. Place a piece of cling wrap on top to seal it from the air.
- To preserve flavor, freeze products rapidly.
- Make sure that produce is cooled properly and that liquids are chilled prior to freezing.
- Maintain proper temperatures of frozen foods and avoid thawing and refreezing.
- Use frozen foods in a reasonable time. Just because a food is frozen does not mean it is not going to deteriorate: the longer a food is frozen, the more loss of quality.
- For best results, cook and serve frozen products shortly after thawing.

Freezing Fruit

Stone Fruits (peaches, apricots, plums, etc.)

Most varieties of peaches and apricots can be frozen with the skin on. The skin will break down when cooked (as in pies, jams, compotes, etc) and adds flavor to the final product. White peaches have a tougher skin and won't break down as easily, so they should be peeled before freezing. If you want to use them for non-cooked applications (or canning them), you should always peel stone fruit.

Cling Peaches vs. Freestone- There are many varieties of peaches and each one has a flavor slightly its own. Experiment with different varieties to find your favorite. As a rule, I prefer cling peaches to freestones. I find that cling peaches have more depth of flavor and an "old fashioned" peachy taste.

Berries

You can freeze blueberries, blackberries and raspberries whole by placing them in a Ziplock or food saver bag. This method works perfectly for fruit that you want to turn into jam or bake with at a later date.

You can also lay the berries out on a cookie sheet and allow them to freeze individually before packaging them into bags. This method works for freezing berries that you might want to be able to pull out whole or a handful at a time. Remove stems or tops of blueberries and strawberries. Strawberries can be frozen whole or sliced.

Freezing Vegetables

Greens

If you have more greens that you can use in a week, don't fret- they are easy to freeze. Simply give them a quick sauté in olive oil (add garlic if you have the time or inclination) and once they are cool, place them in a plastic freezer bag or storage container. You can pull them out of the freezer whenever you want to warm them up to eat as is, add them to a soup or stew or add them to mashed potatoes.

For using in a smoothie, give them a quick blanch, and after their cold soak squeeze out the water. Form small bundles, the size of an egg, on cookie sheets and freeze. Once totally frozen, place the bundles in freezer safe bags or containers.

Onions

If find raw onion to be to "hot" or "oniony," then here are some helpful tricks:

- Chop your onions, put them in a glass mason jar, and fill it with red wine vinegar. Store in the fridge. You are essentially "pickling" the onions which takes away the bite, and they will last almost indefinitely this way. You can take out a few teaspoons at a time to add to whatever salad you may be making. I especially like onions like this in green bean salad or with cucumbers and sour cream. You can do the same thing with shallots.

- The second method works when you want onion in something like tuna, potato or macaroni salad but don't necessarily want the onion pickled. Chop the onion, place it in a sieve and pour boiling water over it then rinse it a few times under hot water. Pouring the boiling water over the onions is not enough to cook it but it takes away the heat over sharpness of the onion.
- Finally, preserving onions is easy to do- simply sauté in olive oil or butter. You can give a quick sauté or allow them to caramelize for an hour. Pack them up, throw them in the freezer and they will keep for months and months.

Tomatoes

Tomatoes can be frozen with or without the skin. The skins can become very tough when used in cooking, so it is usually preferred to blanch and peel them before freezing. Drop the tomatoes, a few at a time in boiling water for 30 seconds to a minute. Then plunge them into a ice water bath and the skins will come right off.

If peeling, seeding, canning, flash freezing are intimidating you can use the “throw ‘em a plastic bag and freeze” method. Remove the core (area around the stem) cut the tomato in half, horizontally, squeeze out most of the pulp and place them in a plastic bag. Fill the bag about half full. Squeeze out as much air a possible. Fold the empty half over the full half and seal the bag.

Whole cherry tomatoes freeze well, too: Remove the stems. Place them on a metal tray and then put the tray in the freezer. When the tomatoes are frozen, place them in a plastic bag and return them to the freezer. You can bring several of these from the freezer and toss them into a stir fry or soup.

Herbs

If you have herbs in your garden or in pots on the balcony, harvest these in the fall. Wash the herbs and remove the leaves from the stems. Chop the basil coarsely. Leave the thyme leave or tarragon leaves whole. Remove the rosemary from the stem and mince it.

Use plastic containers, like ice cube trays, to layer the herbs with butter or oil and herbs. Cover and freeze, then put into labeled bags. When you want to use it, remove it from the freezer a few minutes before hand and scoop out a teaspoon and place it on top of the soup or a piece or meat or some vegetable. The oil or butter flows out and the herb garnishes the dish.

To freeze herbs in butter, get the butter softened in a metal bowl. Add the herbs. Mix thoroughly with a spatula. Place a piece of plastic wrap on the counter. Turn the herb-butter out on to the plastic. Roll it in the plastic to create a long tube shape about one inch thick—resembling sliceable cookie dough. Freeze the butter-herb roll. To use, unwrap and slice pieces to place on top of vegetables, soup or meat. Re-wrap and return the roll to the freezer.

Corn

Corn takes a bit of work to prepare for freezing, but it's well worth it.

- Remove the kernels from the cob with a knife or a specialized corn kernel cutter.

- Use the back of knife to scrape the cob. This is also known as “milking the cob.” Catch the “milk” in a large bowl or the tray on which you removed the kernels. Include this pulp when freezing the corn.
- If you are using a knife to remove the kernels from the cob, place a large tray on the counter. Hold the corn upright with the base perpendicular to the tray. Slice from the top (narrow end) toward the tray. The wider the tray the less clean up you will have. You can scrape the “milk” from the cob directly on to the tray.
- Think of the corn cobs as bones and make a pot of stock. In mid-winter you can use the stock or corn broth to make corn soup, or the base for a vegetarian soup.

Fried corn is simple to make and a real treat in the winter. Use a non-stick frying pan. Add a tablespoon of butter. Melt over medium heat and then add the corn. Raise the heat to medium-high. Using a rubber spatula keep turning the corn over and over. You will evaporate much of the moisture—from freezing—and this will concentrate the flavor. When the corn begins to stick together just slightly, season with salt and pepper and serve. If you want to make the dish a little richer, add a couple of teaspoons of cream.

Shelling Beans

Shelling beans, like Lima (a.k.a. butter beans), English peas or Fava beans are excellent for freezing. The hard working is shelling the beans.

- Shell the beans first by snapping the neck and peeling out the vein.
- Pop the beans/peas out.
- Blanch for 3-4 minutes in boiling salted water.
- Remove and plunge into ice water.
- Drain the beans so that excess water is removed.
- Put the beans in plastic bags or containers and freeze.

Carrots

Carrots can be frozen, but since they are winter storage vegetables they are best kept in the vegetable bin.

- Peel them and cut them into rounds or sticks.
- Blanch the carrots in boiling salted water for 3-4 minutes.
- Plunge them into ice water.
- Remove from the ice water and freeze.
- Since you have cut the carrots into serving sizes, you can remove them from the freezer and place them directly into boiling salted water. Cook to your preference—soft or retaining a bit of texture.

Rhubarb

Wash and chop into one inch pieces and freeze. Cook with some sugar and use it like a sauce. Rhubarb is good for dessert dishes as well as in a sauce for pork or duck.

Green Beans

These can be frozen although they will not have the crisp texture of fresh.

- Remove the stems from the beans—the end that was attached to the plant.
- Blanch in boiling salted water for 2-3 minutes.
- Refresh in ice water.
- Remove from the ice water and freeze.
- Like the carrots, you can take the beans directly from the freezer to the boiling salted water.

Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower & Broccoli

All can be frozen and taken directly from the freezer to the boiling salted water.

- For Brussels sprouts, trim the ends. Cut them in half, vertically. Blanch in boiling salted water for 2-3 minutes and refresh in ice water. Make sure all the water is drained before freezing.
- For cauliflower, separate the pieces. Large pieces can be cut in half so that pieces will be of similar size. Blanch the cauliflower in boiling salted water for 2-3 minutes and refresh in ice water. Freeze in plastic bags.
- For broccoli, separate the stems from the florets. Peel the stems and slice into round or sticks. Blanch the stems for 2 minutes and then add the florets for just one minute. Refresh in ice water. Make sure all the water is removed before freezing.

Canning

The high percentage of water in most fresh foods makes them very perishable. They spoil or lose their quality for several reasons:

- Growth of undesirable microorganisms-bacteria, molds, and yeasts
- Activity of food enzymes
- Reactions with oxygen
- Moisture loss

Microorganisms live and multiply quickly on the surfaces of fresh food and on the inside of bruised, insect-damaged, and diseased food. Oxygen and enzymes are present throughout fresh food tissues. In order to safely preserve foods by canning, we must do the following:

- Using only acceptable jars and sealing lids
- Sanitize jars and lids
- Carefully select and wash food
- Peel some fresh foods
- Hot-pack many foods

- Add acids (lemon juice or vinegar)
- Process jars in a boiling-water or pressure canner for the correct period of time.

Collectively, these practices remove oxygen; destroy enzymes; prevent the growth of undesirable bacteria, yeasts, and molds; and help form a strong vacuum in jars. Good vacuums form tight seals which keep liquid in and air and microorganisms out.

The most important thing you want to avoid is Botulism. Botulism enjoys and thrives in an air free environment. The spores can be found in most soil. Most tomatoes and fruits have a high enough acid content to keep the spores harmless. Vegetables, however, have a lower acid content and thus cannot prevent the spores from growing. The only way to ensure that vegetables are safely canned is to raise the temperature of the product to a higher temperature. This is done by using pressure to raise the temperature to 240 degrees.

Water Bath Canning

Water bath canning is the simplest method of canning foods. It's safe for high acid fruits including tomatoes and pickles. 212 degrees.

Pressure Canning

Most vegetables, meats and lower acid products require a more rigorous canning method- pressure canning. 240 degrees.

Canning Equipment

Canning requires the proper equipment:

- Jars with tight fitting rings
- New sealing lids
- A pot that will hold enough water to cover the tops of the jars with at least an inch of water (for water bath canning.)
- Pressure Canner (for pressure canning)
- Jar holder (a large pair of tongs that allows you to remove the jars from the water)
- Rack for your pot
- Pusher or spoon to help remove any air bubbles
- Jar funnel

A note on jars: Your jars come in a variety of shapes and sizes. From half pints to quarts, wide mouth to standard, rings and lids to lids with seals, the combinations are numerous. Figure out the best selection for your recipe.

The Basics

There are just 3 basic steps for canning:

1. Prep your jars and equipment.
 1. Wash, rinse and sanitize. Keep your jars warm, to minimize breakage when filling.

2. Pick your produce, prepare and pack it.
 1. Prepare your produce and your recipe
 1. Cook your sauces and salsas, prepare the brines and prep your produce.
 2. Tomatoes, peaches and the like should be blanched and skins removed.
 3. Remove pits from stone fruits (including cherries.)
 2. Fill jars leaving a headspace at the top to allow for expansion. Each recipe should provide its own headspace allowance.
 3. Wipe the tops of the jars, so that lids can make a good solid adhesion.
 4. Put on the rings or lids and tighten.
 5. Wipe down the outside of the jars.
3. Submerge your jars in boiling water or cook in a pressure canner.
 1. Put filled jars in the water bath and boil to the specified time listed in the recipe.
 2. Remove at the end of the time, and wipe down and allow to cool.
 3. BE CAREFUL JARS WILL BE HOT!
 4. For pressure canning, put jars in the canner, seal the lid and follow the manufacturer's directions for the proper times.
 5. Store your canned goods in a dry cool place.

Raw-Packing (a.k.a. “Cold-Packing”)

Raw-packing is the practice of filling jars tightly with freshly prepared, but unheated food. Such foods, especially fruit, will often float in the jars. The entrapped air in and around the food may also cause discoloration within 2 to 3 months of storage.

Raw-packing is more suitable for pickles; since pickles require minimal processing due to the very high acid content, and the need to retain the crispness of the raw vegetable. It is generally also used for vegetables processed in a pressure canner, since the additional time getting up to down from pressure ensures plenty of cooking time.

Hot-Packing

Hot-packing is the practice of heating freshly prepared food to boiling, simmering it 2 to 5 minutes, and promptly filling jars loosely with the boiled food. Whether food has been hot-packed or raw-packed, the juice, syrup, or water to be added to the foods should also be heated to boiling before adding it to the jars. This practice helps to remove air from food tissues, shrinks food, helps keep the food from floating in the jars, increases vacuum in sealed jars, and improves shelf life. Preshrinking food also permits filling more food into each jar.

Many fresh foods contain from 10 percent to more than 30 percent air. This is important because how long canned food retains high quality depends on how much air is removed from food before jars are sealed.

Hot-packing is the best way to remove air and is the preferred pack style for foods processed in a boiling-water canner. At first, the color of hot-packed foods may appear no better than that of raw-packed foods, but within a short storage period, both color and flavor of hot-packed foods will be superior.

Use the hot-pack method, especially with high acid foods to be processed in boiling water rather than a pressure canning method. The raw pack method is fine for pickles and for vegetables to be processed in a pressure canner.

Canning Fruits

Fruits must be packed in a solution of water and sugar or fruit juice. It's up to you which to use. Sugar is added to improve flavor, help stabilize color, and retain the shape of the fruit. It is not added as a preservative. Sugar solution is much less expensive (unless you have a supply of cheap grape juice), so I usually use a light solution (2 cups sugar to 6 cups water) to keep sugar (and the added calories) to a minimum.

To prepare syrup, while heating water, add sugar slowly, stirring constantly to dissolve. Bring to a gentle boil and keep it simmering. After preparing the liquid syrup, keep it hot (but not boiling).

Pickling

The easiest way to preserve foods is to pickle them. It changes the flavor of fruits or vegetables, but also preserves them. Nearly all produce can be pickled with varying degrees of success. Pickling basically requires vinegar and salt and beyond that can include spices, herbs, flavorings, and sugar.

Essentials for successful pickling

- Use fresh ingredients that are blemish free and have plenty of moisture.
- Avoid commercially waxed cucumbers and veggies, brine will not penetrate well.
- Use canning or pickling salt for best results. Otherwise, cloudy brine could result.
- Use only high grade distilled vinegars. White vinegar helps retain product colors, and cider vinegars give a different flavoring. 5% acidity required.
- Use only fresh flavorful spices for best results.
- Be sure to use a NON-metal pot - or a coated metal (teflon, silverstone, enamel, etc.) without breaks in the coating-the metal reacts with the vinegar and makes the pickle solution turn cloudy.

Pickling Methods

There are 2 methods of making and preserving pickles: the refrigerator method, which requires hot-packing, will hold pickles for up to about 6 months, and the canned method, which preserves pickles for longer. For either method, Make sure to:

- Clean and sanitize your jars before use.
- Wash and cut your produce.
- Pack jars tightly.
- Cover with brine and can or refrigerate.

Recipes

Refrigerator Dill Pickles

1/2-cup (packed) fresh dill
2 cups thinly sliced onions
1-1/2 cups sugar, honey or Splenda
2 cups white vinegar (5%)
1/2 teaspoon salt (canning or kosher is best, but not vital)
1/2 teaspoon mustard seeds
1/2 teaspoon celery seeds
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric

6 cups of thinly sliced cucumbers

Bring the mix and 2 cups of vinegar to a near-boil.
Pack the cucumbers, whole or slices in and pour the simmering pickle mix liquid over them.
Fill them to within ¼-inch of the top, seat the lid and hand-tighten the ring around them.
To make your dill pickles crispy, put a fresh clean grape leaf in the bottom of each jar.
Let cool. About 2 hours later, pop them into the fridge and wait at least 24 hours!

Basic Brine

1 1/4 cups white distilled vinegar
1 1/4 cups cold water
1 tablespoon kosher or pickling salt
1 tablespoon sugar

Heat above ingredients on the stove to boiling. Pour over packed ingredients. Process as needed.

Quick Sweet Pickles

8 pounds of 3- to 4-inch pickling cucumbers	3 1/2 cups vinegar (5% acidity)
1/3 cup canning or pickling salt	2 teaspoons celery seed
Crushed or cubed ice	1 tablespoon whole allspice
4 1/2 cups sugar	2 tablespoons mustard seed

Yield: 7 to 9 pints

Wash cucumbers. Cut 1/16 inch off blossom end and discard. Cut cucumbers into slices or strips. Place in large bowl and sprinkle with 1/3 cup salt. Cover with 2 inches of crushed or cubed ice. Refrigerate 3 to 4 hours. Add more ice as needed. Drain well.

Combine sugar, vinegar, celery seed, allspice and mustard seed in 6-quart saucepot. Heat to boiling.

Drain cucumbers and pack without heating into clean jars, leaving 1/2-inch head space. Fill jars to 1/2 inch from top with hot pickling liquid. Remove any air bubbles with a plastic spatula. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids.

Process in a boiling water bath. For pints, process for 15 minutes (6,000 feet elevation or below), and 20 minutes for quarts (6,000 feet elevation or below.)

After processing and cooling, store jars four to five weeks to allow flavor to develop.

Pickled Bread-And-Butter Zucchini

16 cups fresh zucchini, sliced (3/16-inch thick)

4 cups onion, thinly sliced

1/2 cup canning or pickling salt

4 cups white vinegar (5% acidity)

Yield: About 8 to 9 pints

2 cups sugar

4 tablespoons mustard seed

2 tablespoons celery seed

2 teaspoons ground turmeric

Cover zucchini and onion with 1 inch ice water and salt. Let stand 2 hours; drain thoroughly.

Combine vinegar, sugar, mustard seed, celery seed and turmeric. Bring to a boil; add zucchini and onions. Simmer 5 minutes.

Fill jars with mixture and pickling solution, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids.

Process pints or quarts in a boiling water bath canner for 15 minutes

Sweet Pepper and Corn Relish

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

3 3/4 cups diced red bell pepper

1 Tablespoon kosher salt

4 cups fresh or thawed corn kernels

1 3/4 cup diced red onion

1 1/2 cups apple cider vinegar

1 1/2 cups sugar

1/2 tsp turmeric

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the peppers and salt and sauté for approximately 12 minutes, stirring often until the peppers soften and begin to caramelize. Add the corn, stirring to combine and cook the vegetables for 3-4 minutes longer, until corn is hot. Turn off the heat and add the onion to the pan; stir well.

In a small saucepan, over medium heat, combine the vinegar, sugar, and turmeric and stir just until the sugar dissolves-about 2 minutes.

Pack the vegetables tightly into 3 clean pint jars and pour the warm brine over the vegetables to cover completely. Process for 15 minutes or cover and let sit at room temperature for 1 day before moving to the refrigerator.

Tomato Soup

Place a tablespoon of butter in a heavy bottom pan. Add one cup each of diced celery, onion and carrot (peeled) with a bay leaf and a teaspoon of dried thyme. Cover the pan and “sweat” the vegetables over the lowest heat possible. Check often to make sure the heat is low enough to prevent any browning of the vegetables.

After 45 minutes add a bag of frozen tomatoes—the equal of eight or ten tomatoes. Cover and continue to cook over low heat. When there is an inch or so of liquid in the pan, raise the heat to medium. Add a cup of chicken stock (optional), a garlic clove (optional) salt and pepper.

Cook for an hour and then pass the soup through a food mill. Season with salt and pepper. Serve the soup in warm bowls. Float a round of thyme butter or teaspoon of basil oil on each portion of soup.

Corn Custard

4 cups of corn
1 tbsp butter
1 tbsp minced onion
1 tbsp flour

1 cup milk
4 eggs
Salt and pepper, fresh nutmeg

Melt the butter in a heavy bottom pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for two minutes, stirring. Add the flour. Use a whisk to combine the butter and flour. Cook for two or three minutes and then add the milk. Continue whisking. Remove from the heat and beat in the eggs one at a time.

Season this mixture with salt, pepper and a little grated nutmeg. Add the corn. Mix well. Turn this mixture out into a baking dish and bake the corn custard in a 350 oven for about 30 minutes.

Canned Home Tomatoes Made from Fresh Tomatoes

- 1) Select the tomatoes
- 2) Get the jars and lids sanitizing
 - 1) The dishwasher is fine for the jars; especially if it has a "sanitize" cycle.
 - 2) If you don't have a dishwasher, submerge the jars in a large pot (the canner itself) of water and bring it to a boil.
- 3) Get the canner prepared
 - 1) Fill the canner about half full of water and start it heating (with the lid on).
- 4) Boil 1 quart of tomato juice and/or water
- 5) Blanch to remove skins
- 6) Fill the jars with the whole or cut tomatoes.
 - 1) Fill them to within ¼-inch of the top.
 - 2) Be sure the contact surfaces (top of the jar and underside of the ring) are clean to get a good seal!
- 7) Add 2 Tablespoons of lemon juice and liquid (boiled tomato juice or water.)
 - 1) After you fill each jar with tomatoes, add 2 tablespoons of lemon juice per quart jar, 1 per pint jar. This helps to reduce the odds of spoilage and to retain color and flavor.
 - 2) Then fill to 1/2 inch of the top with either boiling water or tomato juice.
- 8) Free any trapped air bubbles
 - 1) Using a flat plastic or wood utensil (like a plastic spoon, up side down) free trapped air bubbles by gently sliding it up and down around the inside edge.
- 9) Put the lids and rings on
 - 1) Screw lids on snugly, but not too tight. If there is any tomato on the surface of the lip of the jar, wipe it off first with a clean dry cloth or paper towel.
- 10) Boil the jars in the water-bath canner
 - 1) Put them in the canner and keep them covered with at least 1 inch of water. Keep the water boiling.
 - 2) Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 40 minutes for pints and 45 minutes for quarts.
- 11) Cool jars
 - 1) Lift the jars out of the water and let them cool without touching or bumping them in a draft-free place (usually takes overnight).
 - 2) You can then remove the rings if you like, but if you leave them on, at least loosen them quite a bit, so they don't rust in place due to trapped moisture.
 - 3) Check the seal:
 - 1) Once the jars are cool, you can check that they are sealed verifying that the lid has been sucked down. Just press in the center, gently, with your finger.
 - 2) If it pops up and down (often making a popping sound), it is not sealed. Put that jar in the refrigerator right away, and you can still use it. Or, you can heat the contents back up, re-jar them (with a new lid) and re-cook for the full time in the canner, it's usually ok.
 - 3) Don't worry if you see the tomatoes floating above a layer of liquid; that's normal. Tomatoes have a lot of water in them and it separates a bit. If I had packed the tomatoes in the jars a bit tighter or squeezed for of the free liquid out of them before packing them in the jars, the water layer would be reduced.