

# CO-OP Digest

September/October 2010

North Country Food Cooperative

*For the community. By the community.*

## Yes we CAN!!! by Melissa Hart



After last year's bust year for tomatoes due to late blight and too much rain, I was determined to bask in the bounty this gardening season. To err on the side of caution and ensure a plentiful crop, I ambitiously planted 36 plants in late May. And after canning 30 quarts and freezing various tomato products, they are still coming. Enough, I say!

Inspired by both my bumper crop and the new availability of canning products for sale at the coop, I've decided to share a few tips about canning, along with some modest knowledge that I've acquired along the way.

Resources: For recipes, many canning-product companies offer some online. But preferring something printed and bound, I recently acquired a copy of Ball's "Complete Book of Home Preserving," and with 400 recipes, it got the canning juices flowing. The book offers a great overview of food preservation, complete with instructions on how to use pressure canners (which was particularly helpful for me, as after three years of solely using the bath method, I ventured into pressure canner territory this summer). The

recipes span the major categories: jams and spreads, pickling, condiments and sauces, and tomato products. I have a few other canning cookbooks, but this one has become my mainstay.

Also helpful when getting into food preservation is to talk with the "pros." I consulted with my grandma, who has been canning for decades and still continues her annual tradition of putting up stewed tomatoes. She dug up a few pamphlets put out by the USDA in the 1970s, which were useful and fun to flip through.



Getting started: Once you have an idea of what you want to do with all those veggies, I find it helpful to take the time to get it all set up before the water's boiling. I sort, wash and prep the produce and make sure all the pots and utensils I'm going to need are clean and ready for use. Once prepared, it's easy to jump right into it.

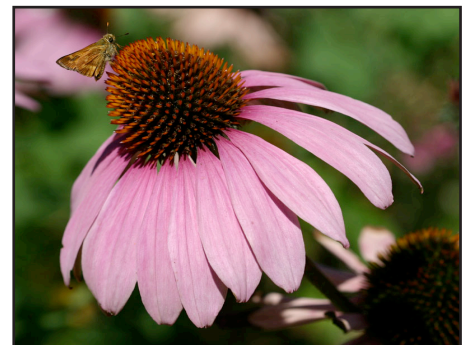
Since it takes a lot of time, energy and resources to go through the canning process, I try and ease the pain by multitasking, creating a food preservation frenzy! If you are already going to steam up the kitchen with giant stockpots simmering on the stove, might as well maximize it with more goings on at once. For instance, on recent "what to do with all these tomatoes" night, I got a pot of Roma tomatoes going to make paste and while it was simmering, I cut up more tomatoes, along with peppers

and onions, for a big batch of fresh salsa, with the thought that I will can the majority of it. Another night, I made a massive vat of pasta sauce and froze it in ½ gallon freezer containers. (Note for the over-burdened: You can also freeze tomatoes whole. First wash and core them, then double-bag in freezer bags and they work perfectly in sauces, soups and stews.)

Although long, steamy nights of lading hot tomatoes into jars may not be most people's ideal pastime, I stay focused on how delicious those organically grown fruits of my labors will taste in the depths of winter. I'm always looking for new ideas/recipes, so if inspired, send me an email to [hart.melissa@rocketmail.com](mailto:hart.melissa@rocketmail.com). Happy canning!

## All about Echinacea

by Linda Marie



Dancing in the sunlight, the abundant purple coneflowers beckon to the passing monarch butterflies. This herb, known as Echinacea is a marvel of beauty and benevolent healing qualities. Native Americans appreciated the healing qualities long before the white man came to this country.

Growing wild on the plains, Native people found it useful for wounds, snakebites, animal bites and insect bites. It was also

used to treat poison oak and poison ivy. Echinacea is also considered a sacred plant in the medicine wheel garden.

This plant is thought of as one of the most powerful cleansing plants, and was used as a blood cleanser and purifier. The indigenous people of the Americas used the root directly in the mouth for sore throats and toothaches. Its effectiveness goes far beyond this type of treatment, however.

The renewed interest in this plant stems from its ability to boost the immune system. "Earl Mindell's herb Bible" cites to studies showing Echinacea prevents the formation of an enzyme, hyaluronidase, which destroys the natural barrier between healthy tissue and unwanted pathogenic organisms. This enzyme, hyaluronidase, is produced by many germs. The enzyme dissolves the protective shield, hyaluronic acid, the body chemical that should be protecting us against germs. Hyaluronic acid, or HA, also lubricates joints. Therefore it is helpful in treating arthritis. The joint inflammation of arthritis, which breaks down HA may be counteracted by the use of Echinacea. It does have a history, in folk medicine, of use with arthritis. Now, results of new studies are reinforcing this use.

Echinacea contains echinacein, which counteracts the germ-tissue-dissolving enzymes, keeping them out of the body, says Michael Castelman in "Healing Herbs, The Ultimate Guide to the Curative Power of Nature's Medicines." This natural infection fighter has a wide range of applications since it works on viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa.

Echinacein is also the substance that helps wounds heal faster. In addition to preventing germs from invading the body,

this substance promotes faster formation of fibroblasts. Fibroblasts are new tissues. Castelman explains that echinacein, "spurs broken skin to knot faster."

Several studies show Echinacea to boost the body's ability to produce infection fighting T-cells. One study from the University of Michigan showed Echinacea extract to be 30% more effective than certain immune boosting drugs. Another study in "Infection and Immunology" revealed an ingredient in Echinacea to improve macrophages (infection-fighting white blood cells) ability to destroy germs. Echinacea is also being studied for use with AIDS.

Mindell and others conclude that echinacea assists the body in strengthening its defense against unwanted viruses, especially herpes and influenza.

Another study proved its vigorous action in the treatment of candida. Adding echinacea to an antifungal treatment has been shown to assist in the reoccurrence of fungal infections. It has also been used effectively for eczema and psoriasis.

Medicinally, the root is used both internally and externally. It can be found in the Coop in capsules and tinctures.

In the garden, it takes the root a few years to be a viable source for teas, decoctions or poultices. This herb is very safe, but if you are dealing with a serious health issue, always consult your physician before adding any herb to your treatment.

## Upcoming Coop Field Trips

by John Pelletier

As some of you may remember, back in the spring (at the annual meeting and in the late spring Newsletter) I was talking about

the possibility of Co-Op field trips. During the last days of my semester, I was able to coordinate a visit up to Elf's Cider Mill just north of Plattsburgh. We had a small group and it was a great success, considering that it was less than a week from when the information went out to when the visit was going to be. The head Elf treated us to wine and apple cider tasting as well as cheese and chocolate pairing. He also showed us the processes involved in pressing the apples and grapes while telling us about his new fruit trees and grapes growing on the property. It was a great time with very positive comments all around.

Well, I am back for the fall term and working to coordinate some more visits. The first visit of the fall will be to Asgaard Farm, a local goat farm which produces very yummy cheese and meats for the Co-Op. As of right now, the exact times and dates are not finalized, but I wanted to get this out into the newsletter so people can start planning. Typically, the fieldtrips happen on a Saturday, usually sometime after lunch (and the farmers' market). We meet up at the Co-Op and then carpool as necessary.

There will be more info in the store and a message will be sent through the email list giving quick information on when this trip will be happening (once I have that finalized). Right now, it looks like the end of September or the beginning of October. Please stay tuned!

Thanks to all who joined me at Elf's farm in the spring; I hope to see some of you on future trips! As always, if you have a suggestion for a farm or sustainable business that adheres to the ideals of the Co-Op—and ideally sells their product at the Co-Op—please let me know.



"The Friends You Never Knew You Had"

Story by Sarah Jennette Illustrations by Kimberly Cummins