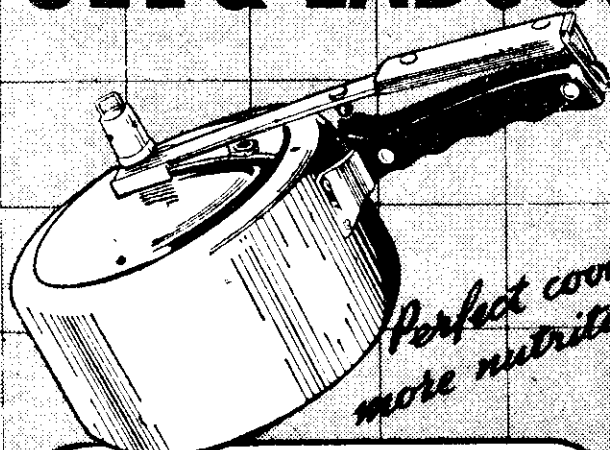


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FIRST FRUITS OF THE YEAR

THIS year let us make as great a point of bottling every fruit as we do of jam-making, so that we have real summer fruits to use for winter desserts. Now that we have plenty of the English preserving "skin" for sealing our jars, there will be no trouble about screw tops and rubbers. Any size or shape of jar or bottle will do, so long as it is sterilized, and not cracked or chipped in the rims.

Bottled Rhubarb

Rhubarb is the first fruit of the year. Wipe fresh sticks with a damp cloth and trim off both ends. Cut into half-inch cubes, or leave in lengths to fit the jars. Pack in as closely as possible, fill up with cold syrup or water to cover. Tie the "skin" firmly over with the string soaked in cold water, which makes it tie tighter and more easily. Have the pieces of "skin" cut the right size for each jar beforehand. Place the jars in deep vessel of cold water. In theory the jars should be completely covered with water; but I have bottled apricots successfully (with this "skin") in a preserving pan which was not deep enough to allow the big jars to be quite submerged—I made up for this by covering over the pan so as to keep in the steam. Set over low heat and bring the water SLOWLY to simmering point (165 degrees)—taking 1½ hours to do this. It is this slow heating which causes all bacteria, moulds and yeasts to be killed right through the contents of the jar, and also keeps the fruit a good colour. Simmering point is shown by small bubbles rising from the bottom of the vessel to the surface. Keep up the gentle boiling for 5 to 10 minutes for most fruits. Tomatoes and pears need 30 minutes. Lift out and stand to cool on a wooden surface, out of a draught. The "skin" will be sucked down into a hollow as the jar cools, showing the pull of the vacuum. Store in a dry cool, dark place. You can wrap brown paper round to keep out the light.

Oven Method

Fill the jars with rhubarb as before but don't fill up with water. Cover each jar with a patty pan or saucer and have the oven at *regulo* 1 or 250 degrees. Leave in oven till rhubarb looks cooked—about ½ to ¾ hour, depending on age and the size of the pieces. If the rhubarb sinks much in the jars you may fill them up from each other, but return them to the oven after filling so that the exposed tops are re-sterilized; leave for another 10 minutes. Black currants or loganberries are excellent preserved with rhubarb. Take from the oven one at a time, fill with boiling water or syrup, and tie down with the "skin" and string as quickly as possible. If you wish, you may put just a little water in each jar at the beginning.

The Syrup

A very heavy syrup is the cause of fruit rising in the jars. Allow ½lb. sugar to a pint of water; put into a clean saucepan over low heat, stir till

sugar is dissolved, then bring to boil. Boil for 3 to 5 minutes, then cool, and strain through muslin to make really clear. Fruit may be bottled with or without sugar, but the flavour is better if done in syrup.

Gooseberries

This is the second fruit of the year. They should certainly be bottled for winter use; they keep their shape and colour well if picked when mature but not ripe. Wash them after topping and tailing and bottle them either by the

STEAK AND KIDNEY PUDDING

One and a-half pounds blade steak; half an ox kidney; 1 tablespoon chopped onion; 1 dessert-spoon flour; 1 tablespoon chopped parsley; 2 hard-boiled eggs; 1 cup water; salt and pepper to taste.

THE SUET CRUST: ½lb. shredded suet; ¼lb. breadcrumbs; ¼lb. flour; 1 teaspoon baking powder; 1 teaspoon salt; 1 small cup water. Make the suet crust and line a greased basin with part of it, leaving enough to cover the top, then cut the steak and kidney into small pieces and dredge them in the mixture of flour, salt and pepper. Fill the basin with alternate layers of meat, kidney, chopped onion and parsley and sliced egg. When full cover with 1 cup of stock or water. Put the crust on top. Cover with butter paper and tie cloth over top. Put into pot of boiling water and boil 4 hours.

water or the oven method as for rhubarb. Grade them so that the big ones are in one bottle and the little ones in another. Give the jars a tap on the bench now and again when filling, to shake the berries down into place.

Fruit Jelly

Allow 2 level dessertspoons of powdered gelatine to 1 pint of fruit puree, sweetened to taste. Make the puree by rubbing the fruits through in a sieve into a large bowl either with fresh fruit or heated bottled fruit. Gooseberries and rhubarb combined make a good jelly. Dissolve the gelatine in a little warmed fruit juice but don't boil. Stir the dissolved gelatine into the warm puree, mixing thoroughly. Have a mould rinsed out with cold water, pour in the puree and leave to set. If you want a clear jelly, use the juice alone and allow an extra dessertspoon of gelatine. Serve the jelly with the fruit from which the juice was drained—also with ice cream.

Rhubarb Charlotte

Grease a pie-dish with butter and sprinkle the bottom and sides thickly with breadcrumbs. Or, you can line the dish with thin slices of bread and butter—but the crumbs make a nicer charlotte. Beat the stewed (or bottled) rhubarb—or gooseberries—to a pulp, and put a layer over the crumbs. Cover with another layer of crumbs or slices,

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