

Stir creativity with pickling, juicing, canning

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Alongside the roadway in Talladega, Alabama, a young Rose Garrison plucked maypops — or passion fruit — christened for their month of abundance and the pop they make against open palms, producing seeds and sweet nectar. At her family's farm bustling with chickens, hogs, and nourishing gardens, Garrison quickly learned how to cultivate her own food from nature's goods.

Family recipes from her mother and grandmother included mashing sweet potatoes into pies to churning homemade peach ice cream. These culinary traditions are so rooted in experiential learning that her family is still trying to resurrect her grandmother's recipe for fried apple pie, which was never written down. Garrison watched and learned to transform the blackberries, wild plums, and crabapples from the woods into jellies and jams. Though she's since taken root in Tallahassee, she's sustained these pickling and canning traditions for the past 33 years.

Garrison is looking forward to the upcoming Frenchtown Heritage Fest 2016. Now in its sixth year, the festival will unite local businesses and artisans for a full day of community celebration in one of Tallahassee's historic neighborhoods. She hopes her booth will introduce attendees to the new flavors and be a hub for connection through food.

"Everything has a season," states Garrison. "I like foraging for my fruit out in the woods and looking for U-pick markets. I'll go to my neighbors and ask if I can pick some of their pears or tomatoes, then I pickle half and give them half — I get some, you get some."

A rich family tradition of home cooking allows Garrison to reach back into history to a practice that has since been forgotten. She explains that while canning itself is a universal piece of culture across United States' agriculture, its roots are strong in the southernmost regions. The culinary artistry she employs comes across in her many creations as proprietor of Marie's Jelly, Jam, and Herbs.

Though she had watched her grandmother for years, Garrison was mostly self-taught at canning in the beginning, accruing her culinary skills at Florida A&M University's main dining hall. Just as the history of canning has ties to survival in winter or other extreme conditions, Garrison too began making jams in her early twenties out of necessity as she and her husband raised their three young children.

"It saved me a whole lot of money," says Garrison. "We didn't have to worry about going to the grocery store and my kids would always tell their friends, 'We don't eat jelly out of the store, momma makes our jellies.' As I got more into canning, I would talk to other older women that were doing it, because young women aren't as much into it."

Garrison attributes this declining interest to a lack of education and motivation surrounding food sources and the ubiquity of the "instant" or "microwave" generational trends. She can remember from her childhood having neighbors over and taking part in community-based art forms like quilting and canning as a way of keeping up with one another and sharing each other's company.

She finds inspiration in tasting dishes from smaller, locally owned restaurants around town and only uses whatever is growing in season. Garrison listens to relaxing rhythm and blues tracks as she works, or Food Network as she enjoys the ingenuity of shows like Chopped. For her, canning isn't just a means to an end, but a chance to access her creativity and stay immersed in its legacy.

"It's staying connected to the past, and it is a lot of work, but I love it," remarks Garrison. "It releases me and puts me in a place where I can use my creativity as far as taking something in its regular form and twisting it just a bit."

ServSafe certified, Garrison always begins with clean utensils and glass jars, as well as a sterile workspace. Her products are fresh or frozen at their peak in order to preserve flavor. After completing prep work, it takes Garrison about an hour to make six jars of any one product, mashing, pureeing, or slicing depending on the intended end result.

Layering zests, spices, and tangs are where her imagination and palette flourishes as she concocts pear and pepper relishes, pickled okra, and even watermelon and beet jelly. With the latter two, she's innovated a juicing process for beets and watermelon in order to make the unique flavors. Right now her garden is bursting with habaneros, a favorite medium with which she is currently experimenting.

"They're so complex," explains Garrison. "The habanero jelly I'm making has habaneros, red onions, pineapples, and red peppers, and it really makes your taste buds jump. It's very layered because I never want to make a one-note jelly or jam."

Though she currently works from home, Garrison wants to participate more with the Frenchtown Heritage Hub's Kitchenshare program, which was recently awarded a Knight Foundation Grant. She hopes to utilize the program's commercial kitchen to teach community members the craft of canning and pickling. It's also a way of educating about the power of knowing what your food consists of and where it



Rose Garrison will be selling her Marie's Jelly at the Frenchtown Heritage Festival on Nov. 5

ALVIN MCBEAN



Rose Garrison's pickled okra and pickles will be for sale at the Frenchtown Heritage Festival on Nov. 5.



If you go

What: Frenchtown Heritage Fest 2016
When: 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturday, Nov. 5
Where: Frenchtown Heritage Hub, 524 N. Milk Drive
Cost: Free
Contact: For more information, call 850-270-3573 or visit www.frenchtownheritage.org.

came from. Additionally, Garrison lists the health benefits of the ingredients she uses such as hibiscus, which benefits the blood and watermelon's vitamin C content. She's also hoping to develop a line of jellies and jams that are diabetic friendly. Setting up shop at Frenchtown's Heritage Market every Saturday, she is invigorated by feedback while teaching younger customers how to taste her products using their whole palette.

"The market brings you fresh vegetables, food, and it brings the community together," says Garrison. "It's bringing that wholeness back that we used to have a long time ago and being able to connect with that person that you got the food from and have a conversation with them. I've always believed in reaching back — each one, teach one."

This lost art form is not only key to reigniting community conversations, but bringing back an American cultural tradition that Garrison refuses to allow to fade into the fabric of history. As her hobby becomes a burgeoning business, Garrison is thankful for the support of her husband, children, and friends, who pushed her to begin sharing her food art with the public nearly three years ago. It allowed her to start over at 55 years old and reinforces her belief that it is never too late to reinvent yourself in pursuit of your artistic impulse.

"I hope it can spark someone to do something in their life that they're passionate about so they can give back to the community," states Garrison, reflecting on her own mission. "Love is all in my food and I'm making sure what I serve is the best of the best because I'm thinking about you sitting down with your family, taking it to a picnic, or going out of town and sharing it with friends. It's a way of giving a part of me to someone else."



Rose Garrison displays some of her jelly.

ALVIN MCBEAN

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