

I'm a fan of Good Morning America so today I'm watching as they discussed Throw Back Thursday. The topic was how much the set had changed from thirty years ago. It occurred to me that I just posted a picture on Facebook that might fit in a Throw Back Era except it's from last week. The picture is my husband, Harold, mowing hay in our acre and a half hayfield. Let me make myself clear. I don't consider him the throw back. Just the hay making equipment. The machinery he uses works for our small hayfield. He often recalls sixty years ago in Arkansas when he ran the dump rake for his grandfather. He was small and the lever to release the hay clump was hard to tromp on so Harold had to stand up and use both feet to release the hay. He considers the equipment he uses today much easier than what he remembered as a kid.

Most of what we do around our acreage might seem like a throw back from another era. A while back I put another picture of my cherry pitter on Facebook. There are newer pitters on the market, but I didn't know that when I found the pitter in an antique store. Before I bought it I spent hours pitting the cherries by hand. Even then it took me a year to decide the pitter was worth \$20. We were visiting my Aunt Bonnie near Cabool, Missouri when I first saw the pitter in a small country shop. I backed off. It had been a few months since I pitted the cherries in the spring. Guess my memory was short. The next spring, we had a large crop of cherries again. All the time, I pitted I imagined that pitter laying idle on a shelf hundreds of miles away. So on our annual visit to the Ozarks my aunt said where would I like to go. First stop I wanted to make was that antique store. Aunt Bonnie reminded me it had been a year. The pitter was probably gone. She wasn't about to dash my hopes. Oh, please, can we go look? I have to know for sure. We entered into the rather dark shop interior, and my aunt said, "Okay, where do you think the pitter was?" "I know exactly," I said and walked right to it. I grabbed it, paid for it and laid it in the closet until the next spring. Harold set the table up out in the yard, and the ripe berries squirted on me, the table and the ground. Hey, I was happy. I saved so much time with my throw back pitter.

We've lived on this acreage for almost twenty five years. When we moved in, we planted all kinds of fruit trees. The advantage to having our own place had been to raise all the food we could eat and then some. For two recent springs, a freeze killed any chance of having fruit. This year we are blessed with crops. That means if I don't want any of the fruit to go to waste I must freeze or can the excess so we can enjoy eating our apples, pears, cherries, plums, and peaches during the winter. Forget about the peaches. We only had ten on our very old tree so I made a pie. That will be gone very soon. Two small peach trees are growing fast so my hope is for a good crop of peaches in a year or two. Plus, I saved the peach seeds to start another tree.

The plum tree has lost several limbs lately so the plums are up high. I used the apple picker to reach what I could. To make preserving plum sauce quick, I've cooked the plums whole. Next I wait for them to cool and take out all the seeds by hand so I can put the plums in the blender and make sauce out of them. I've canned a six pints. Not as many as other years, and I worry the tree won't be alive much longer so I saved seeds to plant. The tree came from an older tree in town near my brother-in-law's garden. I suppose the variety is damsel. I know I like the size and flavor of this plum so want to keep from losing it.

A few days ago I canned pears. We've heard that fruit isn't ripening as fast this year because of the dry weather. I picked the pears on lower branches that were about to touch the ground. It took a week for them to soften in the house. Since that worked, I had Harold pick more. I'm waiting for them to ripen. The pears left on the tree seem to be growing yet. I like the idea of larger pears to eat fresh. By the time we eat the two quarts I put in the refrigerator, a pint in Jell-O, the bowl full on the table and the pie that is now gone, I will be ready to can most of the rest.

I wonder how many women in this area preserve their food or have a large garden and orchard like we do. It happens to be in my DNA as they say these days. My earliest memories in the fifties are of my mother with her pressure cooker hissing on the wood cookstove in Missouri. Hot humid days made for miserable work with no air conditioning and not even a fan. The house stayed hot forever after canning season began. Jars filled with vegetables, fruit and meat replaced the empty ones in the root cellar. We had a top notch root cellar, cool and sometimes a black snake's retreat in the summer heat, but the safest place to be during tornado season.

Before pressure cookers were cold packers. I still use one of those, too. Back in my grandmother's day, the cold packer took hours to preserve vegetables and meat, but the wood cookstove was on all day anyway. Grandma Bright had nine children so she kept a large pot of beans or stew simmering all the time. Before cold packers, women put a zinc lid with a rubber seal on the blue jars. They probably thought to smell the food when they opened the jars to make sure it smell safe to eat. Rule of thumb was boil any canned food hard for fifteen minutes. Between poorly processed canned food and leaving left overs on the table from one meal to the next because there wasn't refrigeration, food poisoning happened often. It was sometime in the forties before canning flats and rings became popular in our area.

My filled jars go on shelves in our basement. A couple years ago, we had our hot water heater replaced. The repairmen were amazed at the amount of food I had preserved. In the winter, I don't have a very large grocery list. No need to get out on a snowy or frigid day. Between, my freezers, my basement shelves and my bread maker we can hibernate. My food preservation is a source of accomplishment made easier by having air conditioning. This is our second year with a cool house during a very hot week. Once upon a time, I froze vegetables in the blanched stage and thawed them out to can in the fall.

Today I've canned four quarts of downfall apples. The tree is loaded, but not as ready as I'd like them and the downfalls don't seem to ripen like the pears did. I've always been interested in older recipes so I kept one for apples probably from a Capper's. Most of my older recipes came from relatives or older canning books. This Canned Pie Apple recipe can be used to put in Jell-O, too.

#### Canned Pie Apple

1 quart of sliced apples

¼ cup sugar

Using the above ratio, fill a large nearly air tight container with apples. Mix the sugar slightly into the apples with each quart added. When the container is filled and packed down add the cover and let stand on the counter overnight. In the morning, pack the apple slices into jars and seal. Remember to pack the apples down in the jar to avoid a lot of shrinkage.

Cold pack in water no longer than 10 minutes after the water comes to a hard boil. Apples will stay very white. Treat as fresh apples for a crisp or pie.