

My Mother Loved to Make Jelly and Jams

by Missy Cox Jones

My Mother was Minnie Steward Cox. She came from a family of 10 children. So, she grew up learning how to cook, can and make jellies and preserves.

When I was a young girl, and old enough to help her, we made lots of plum thicket jelly. Now that jelly is the most beautiful in the world, and no artist can paint a picture that will show how pretty a color that jelly is. On the 'McCullough Place", we had a big wild plum thicket down south east of the house. We watched it pretty close, and when the plums started to get ripe, then we stocked up on sugar, SureJell, and jars and lids and rings.

Before the days of SureJell to help make the jellies, women could still make the jelly, it just took more sugar. My Daddy would buy sugar in 24 pound (I think) sacks, and vinegar by the gallon.

Of course we saved our jars from the year before. Maxine and I would be given the job of washing the jars. We did this in a big wash tub sitting on the bench. That was a dirty job, because the jars had probably been stored down in the cellar, and we had to contend with spiders and other bugs. But, we cleaned them good, and our mother placed the jars to be used in big pots of boiling water on the stove. She wasn't an educated woman, but she knew to have her jars all sterilized in big pots, and also the lids and rings would be sterilizing in a stewer of boiling water on the stove top.

She had a jar lifter that she used to lift the jars out of the boiling water, set them on cup towels on the cabinet, used a jar filler, filled the jar with the jelly, took a knife, went around the jelly in the jar several times to get the bubbles out of the jelly, then with some tongs, picked up the lid from the stewer, put it on the jar, and lifted out the ring, put it on the jar and tightened it.

We also made lots of sweet pickled peaches. These were cling peaches, and so pretty. Lots of times, Mama would call them "Indian Peaches". She would take the peaches, peel them, stick them with several cloves, and boil them in a mixture of vinegar, water and sugar. They would be getting a little tender, and she put them in jars and sealed them up. They were so pretty. And, the house smelled so good while we were doing this.

I remember reading about the pioneers using pickles, pickled peaches and such things for the vinegar in them. They ate a lot of fat meats, and they thought the vinegar in the pickles would be beneficial to them.

My Mama made lots of other kinds of jellies. Blackberry was beautiful. My Mama would strain the juice and make the jelly. We also made grape jelly, and the little yellow tomato preserves. One other thing, my Mama loved to make beet pickles. She could make the best that I have ever tasted. With sugar, spices and vinegar, the house smelled so good, and the beet pickles shown like jewels in their jars.

I remember standing in the cellar and looking at all of those jars of vegetables and fruits and jellies. I forgot all of the hot days of working, of watching the canner to see when the gauge went down when we canned vegetables and the hot days of picking in the garden, of hoeing weeds and all of the other work. This food cellar meant that we would be eating good and we wouldn't have to buy that food in town.