

Food preservation

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

The preserving of food for the coming winter season was a hard and time-consuming necessity. Even though nearly everyone living in the Applegate in the early 1930s had a farm animal or two, a vegetable garden, and possibly an apple tree, many food items came from the surrounding countryside. I have written about the hunting of deer and bear, fishing for trout and the harvesting of honey, but there were other delectable foods to be harvested as well.

Sometimes a camping trip to



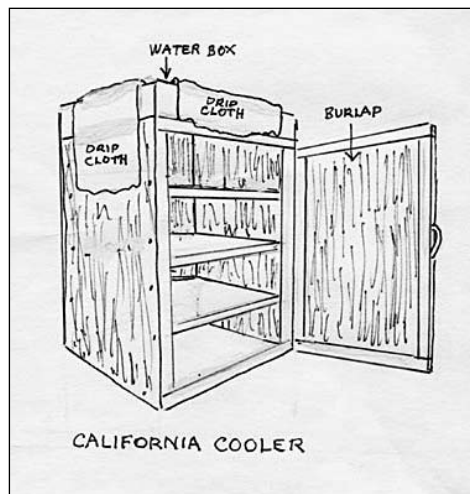
Huckleberry Mountain would be arranged where the collection and preserving of huckleberries were the ultimate goals of the trip. (I do not remember exactly where this mountain is, but it may be near the Prospect area of the Rogue Valley.) My mother used a large copper boiler with a wooden rack inside to keep glass jars from resting on the bottom of the boiler and possibly breaking from the heat. This boiler, when filled with water and the berry-filled glass jars, which were sealed with a screw-on lid and rubber gasket, was placed over a fire and brought to a boil.

Commercial pear orchards in the Rogue Valley also supplied fruit for canning. Many people, including my mother and me, would work at the packing house during the harvest season and take home rejected pears. One year my brother and mother were working at the packing house and sending home a lot of pears that my dad and I spent long hours cleaning and preserving. I don't remember having any fun doing that!

Another way of saving food for the coming winter would be to dry it. I remember corn cut from the cob being placed on sheets laid on the roof of the house with sheer curtain material secured over the top. This allowed the air to flow through but kept the birds from eating the corn. Mother made a very good corn soup from the dried kernels.

Everything that could be pickled was. The pickling of vegetables allowed them to be canned without the worry of botulism and made for some delicious eating. Of course, making dill pickles from cucumbers was common, but beets also were a favorite. Sugar is a great preservative, and many jams and jellies filled the cupboard in autumn. In earlier times a layer of hot beeswax or paraffin was poured on top of the cooked fruit in the jar, thus sealing in the flavor to be savored on a cold winter morning at breakfast.

Keeping food edible for a few days could be a challenge. I remember the family having a cold closet in our house and also using what we called a "California Cooler." The closet



was built into the house by leaving an opening in the floor and ceiling, then building a cabinet or closet over the openings. This allowed the cool air from under the house to circulate into the space. A screen was placed over the openings to

keep out pests and shelves were placed in the cabinet on which to set food. Pans of milk were kept in there—some to drink, others to be made into cottage cheese, or the cream skimmed off the top to make butter.

The California Cooler was used outside in the summertime where the air would move through a screen of gunnysack material surrounding a wooden frame. On top of the frame was a wooden box for water with the ends of the burlap in it. The water would wick down the sides of the box and the air moving through would cool the interior. A cool shady area in the yard made this an even more effective way of keeping our food cool.

Thankfully, today I use my freezer and refrigerator to keep food fresh or tastily preserved; however, it could be said that some of the flavors of the past are missed.

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Photos above from left:

The all-purpose boiler tub had many uses, such as canning, laundry (note the scrub board and bluing) etc.

Old canning jar with rubber gasket and screw-on lid.

Summertime outdoor California cooler.

Correction:



This photo was incorrectly captioned in our last issue. The correct caption should read: "Morris Byrne and turkeys circa 1942."