

Selling B. C.'s Fruit: Home Canning Recipes from B.C. Tree Fruits Ltd.

Mary Leah de Zwart and Linda Peterat

British immigrants started the first orchards in the Okanagan and Kootenay Valleys over a century ago and the struggle to create a sustainable tree fruit industry continues today. B.C. Tree Fruits Ltd. was created as the marketing arm of the BC Fruit Growers Association in 1936. In 1939 it became the sole selling agency for the area, just in time to enjoy a profitable war time era of fruit marketing.

One marketing strategy used by B.C. Tree Fruits was to produce recipe books that encouraged home canning. The books appear to have been produced annually and were provided free to consumers through retail outlets across B.C. and the Prairies. Prior to B.C. Tree Fruits, the Research Branch of the Dominion of Canada Department of Agriculture had provided publications that researched and promoted home canning. This role was later taken over by the Agriculture Canada Research Station at Summerland, BC. In the 1940s and 1950s, BC Tree Fruits in cooperation with the Research Station took a more visible role through the recipe books as a direct marketer to consumers. Today these recipe books are readily available in many community and the national archives, can be found in used bookstores, and are likely still part of many home collections. Remarkably this marketing strategy receives no mention in the main historical accounts of the tree fruit industry in the Okanagan.ⁱ

We examined four recipe books produced by B.C. Tree Fruits in the 1940s and 1950s, and compared the reasons stated as to why we should do home canning, the canning methods encouraged, and the recipes provided. In this article we include a recipe for Cherry Olives because it appears in all four books, has appeared in numerous community recipe books, and can be found in a current book of cherry recipes.ⁱⁱ It exemplifies one reason people do home canning and that is to create flavours that are somewhat exotic and not otherwise available

locally. With the current increase in interest in locally grown foods, home canning shows signs of being more popular than ever.ⁱⁱⁱ

The cover of the first book we examined, *Wartime Home Canning of B.C. Fruits* (1944), shows a young girl with pigtails, holding up her skirt filled with peaches. "Food is considered as important as munitions," states the introduction, and specific instructions are given for using the correct ration coupons. Less time in transit means more time on the tree and the corresponding increase in natural sugar content and health-giving properties results from the intense Okanagan sunshine. "Insist on BC fruit," the book states, "It is a little later than imported but is worth waiting for." The hot-pack method of canning, in which fruit is cooked before being put into the jars, is recommended because it reduces the number of containers by 40 to 50 per cent. Canning without sugar is advised. Patriotism has a practical Canadian twist -- using tree-ripened fruit will require fewer sea shipments of sugar and therefore not risk the lives of sailors. Alice Stevens, a home economics teacher in Vernon who had obtained a B.Sc. in Home Economics from the University of Manitoba in 1923, edited the book.

Home Canning of B.C. Fruits (1947), also edited by Stevens, features the same girl on the cover, this time holding a basket of apples. The focus in this book changes from winning the war to winning over the housewife. It proclaims: Housewives will look with pride at the natural colour and appearance of their home canning efforts. Canning will encourage the housewife's natural instinct to "squirrel" away food for the winter. And, nutrition is given as a further reason for canning with the reminder that Canada's Food Rules call for at least one serving of fruit each day. The book offers support and encouragement for housewives. Canning requires planning, the book concedes, and advises housewives to have their "decks cleared of other household activities" so they could "go right at it."

In both the 1944 and 1947 books, canning methods are complex with different recommendations and recipes for each fruit. Although the 1947 edition again recommends the hot-pack method, the reason changes from decreasing the

number of required containers to being able to pack more fruit into each jar and process the jars for a shorter period of time. Proportions for thin, medium and thick syrups are provided, with the suggestion that thin (one cup sugar to two cups water) was the most popular because people had lost their taste for the thick syrup (two cups sugar to one cup water) used in pre-ration days.

Both books describe the varieties of each fruit available on the market, and the 1947 book gives considerably more space to recipes and uses. Both books recommend canning over jam making as a better use of resources. A combination of plums and apples is recommended for jam because the two fruits supplement each other for acid and pectin and thus require less sugar. The 1947 book includes a section on Frosted Foods, a nod to the increasing number of consumers who have access to frozen food lockers.

Two additional undated, post-1952 recipe books credit Dorothy Britton as editor. Britton obtained her B.Sc. in Home Economics from Macdonald Institute in 1939 and was hired by the Summerland Experimental Station in 1952. She appears on the cover of the *B.C. Fruit Preserving Guide*, holding a jar of neatly labeled prune plums in front of three rows of shiny, fruit-filled jars. In this book marketing is more direct and explicit. Consumers are instructed to look for the B.C. Tree Fruits logo on every box of fruit. Home canning is encouraged as an easy and satisfying art. It is now claimed that the fruit is "scientifically picked" and "properly packed" to provide the "very best fresh fruit eating and the finest preserves." In contrast to the two earlier publications, Britton's approach is to demystify canning and preserving by shortening and simplifying instructions. Where a paragraph had previously been used to describe canning without sugar, in this edition two short sentences do. Recipes fill almost six pages of the 15-page booklet and the use of *Certo* is encouraged in jams and jellies.

The cover of *Your Home Canning Guide for Sunshine Meals*, the second of the books edited by Britton, features a delicious looking jar of peach preserves superimposed on a stunning view of an Okanagan lake. The foreword directly

addresses the intended audience of Western Canadian homemakers with a description of the excellent fruit-growing conditions of the Okanagan Valley. Once again reference is made to scientific picking and proper packing. Big red letters remind homemakers to wait for the superior flavour and appearance of B.C. fruit. Economy is encouraged. "B.C. peak-of-the-season preserving prices will make it well worth your while." Varieties of available fruits are extensively described and photographs show actual packing methods. More photographs are used to illustrate the canning procedures. The recipe section is enlarged to eight pages out of fifteen. The cold pack method is recommended because it produces a better-looking product that resembles commercial canning. Homemakers are instructed on how to make their food more attractive. For example the B.C. Special Fruit Salad recipe features a half pear or peach on a bed of watercress, flanked with finger sandwiches filled with chicken and celery salad, around which is arranged celery sticks filled with cream cheese and chopped nuts, garnished with cherries or grapes.

The four recipe books reflect economic and societal changes in Canada as much as they show the how-to of canning and preserving. During this time period, the target audience changes from the wartime housewife whose work was as important to the war effort as guns, to the postwar homemaker who was expected to make things look nice and support the economy. The recipe books edited by Stevens promoted thrift in order to win the war and recover from its effects. Those by Britton promoted appearance and increased use of resources, a micro economic example of increasing consumer spending in order to prevent the recurrence of macro-economic problems.

Home canning in 2007 can be seen as both nostalgic and ideological; nostalgic because it takes us back to the kitchens of our mothers and grandmothers "putting away" nature's bounty, and ideological because it promotes food security through the use of local foods. Cherry olives epitomize the sustainability value inherent in canning. We can hardly wait for the Okanagan cherries to be in season to try this ever-popular recipe.

Cherry Olives

The 1944 and 1947 books recommend Cherry Olives for their increasing popularity at parties, particularly with the men-folk. The later editions used more sugar and mixed pickling spice. This is the simplest version, found in the 1944 wartime edition.

4 pounds B.C. cherries

1 quart vinegar

1 cup water

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon salt

Wash the cherries and cut off the stems with scissors to a length of about one inch. Pack the cherries in jars and cover with a solution made by combining the vinegar, water, sugar and salt. Seal the jars and store in a cool, dry place. Yield – 5 pints of Cherry Olives.

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ⁱⁱ Nahirney, Denise (1996). *Okanagan cherry sensations, A special Okanagan recipe collection*. Kelowna, BC: Orchard Industry Museum.

ⁱⁱⁱ Judy Kingry claims Canadians devote more time to canning than Americans, quoted in *Food for Thought*, Fall, 2001 accessed on April 28, 2007 www.growingalberta.com/foodforthought/fft-harvest-2001