**Canning Tomatoes- the last taste of summer**

It’s not too late. When we think about food preservation, we usually think summer, but there are many things that can be preserved in the fall. Tomatoes come to mind. Tomatoes are almost gone, but if you have some still producing, why not preserve them for the winter soups and stews.

The farmers market slowing down, certain varieties of tomatoes are still around. Why not preserve that last bit of sun shine in a jar for the winter nights?

For as long as I can remember, at least one weekend every autumn during my childhood my family would spend a morning picking tomatoes that would be turned into sauce and canned.

The canned tomatoes would be used over the coming months to make pasta sauce for our family. While the entire process was a dreaded chore for a kid like me, the end result led to a beautiful aroma of tomato sauce simmering on the stove which still reminds me of home.

our entire main floor kitchen becomes a tomato-processing plant that includes a machine that separates the seeds and skin from the tomato pulp.

After the tomatoes are juiced, they're put in a pot and simmered for three hours. When the sauce has thickened it is poured into hot jars and sealed. Then we wait for the ping of the lid seal. That ping sound means the seal on the lid is closed tight over the jars.

Perhaps it is just that – the ethereal nature of a “real” tomato creates deep longing during those months of unavailability. I believe that another important aspect is nostalgia. Along with locally grown sweet corn, tomatoes were often the target for those Sunday drives with parents, or grandparents, aimed at a nearby farm stand, carefully selected, and used as the centerpiece of a backyard picnic.

Do you want to extend summer and learn how to preserve your fresh grown tomatoes? The North Carolina Cooperative Extension will be offering a Canning Tomatoes Class on September 10th, 6:00 pm at the Polk County Center and another one on September 13th at the Henderson County Center. There is a fee for the workshop. Call the Polk County Center at 828/894- 8218 or the Henderson County Center at 828/697-4891 to register for the classes. Same material will be covered at both workshops.