

Review - Preserved - Nick Sandler and Johnny Acton

Contributed by Behemoth

First up I should say I haven't done anything set out in the book, just read it so that's the basis for my comments. It's a well presented book, well written, and laid out, pretty pictures, good recipes and it's obvious the authors have lots of enthusiasm for this subject. However I think it would be better titled as "an introduction to food preservation" as it is short on some detail and it is by no means a comprehensive manual. Perhaps there's a certain amount of trial and error associated with some of the techniques but there is a risk of food poisoning if preserving is not done properly and more detail would be reassuring. Also it seems some of the methods described are employed 'just because they can', there's no evaluation of which method may be better in certain circumstances.

Overall there's nothing you couldn't have picked up from the RC books and website. Don't get me wrong, it's good book to have and the recipes are great. I'm planning where to build my cold and hot smoker but I would not pay full price, £25, for this book. At £6.99 from the Book People I am happy with it.

To review it I'll go through the chapters on the different methods in the order they do. I must stress that I haven't tried any of this yet so it's based on first impressions of the text.

Overall, it's well laid out and easy to follow. The writing is lively and enjoyable. It's pitched at the UK and US market so all weights and measures are metric and imperial; occasionally they refer to 'cups' without the metric equivalent. Drying

In the opening they describe the different types of dried meat, fish, fruit, mushrooms and herbs from around the world and then deflate you with a reminder that the conditions prevalent in damp Britain aren't conducive to air drying. They perk you up again with basic instructions on how to make a drying box: simply a wooden box 75cm tall, 45cm deep, 60cm wide, with an access door, a couple of rails to support rods, a few holes drilled in the sides top and bottom, a 60 watt bulb to provide heat and there you are.

They provide basic instructions for making and storing biltong, jerky, bresola, dried herbs, mushrooms, chillies, tomatoes and fruit (including fruit leathers). All the advice is based around either using the drying box or an ordinary domestic oven, which can tie it up for some time. Although commercially available dehydrators are mentioned as being the best vehicle for drying, particularly the fruit, mushrooms, tomatoes and chillies, there is no discussion of different types/brands, performance, indication of costs or how they are used. Salting

They open with an intro extolling the benefits of salting in terms of the changes it brings to a product on terms of texture and concentrated flavour. The first entry is on anchovies which they tell us deteriorate so quickly that few enjoy them fresh, which is why they are salted. Just in case you can get them fresh, undeteriorated, they tell you how to salt them. They also cover salting pork, cod, beef, ham, capers and gravadlax.

My only quibble is that they advise you to keep the finished meat products somewhere cool, dark and airy. A rough indication of how cool and relative humidity would be appreciated. I suppose it becomes obvious if your conditions aren't cool, dark or airy enough, but it becomes an expensive waste of time if you get it wrong; we don't all have sheds or garages. Cold and Hot Smoking

A very enthusiastic chapter where they describe how to build and operate cold and hot smokers and provide details on the temperatures you should and should not be achieving. A few photos of the construction and operation of the smokers would have helped but there's enough there to get on and do it. There's then a plethora of instructions on how to smoke fish, shellfish, meat, eggs and custard tarts. Sausages

A brief history of the sausage and a clear intro to making sausages, with suitable emphasis on hygiene and the risks of food poisoning, the curing and fermentation process, how to make them and how to hang and store. There's plenty of info and some helpful information that 'cool' is below 15C. There are six basic recipes for different sausages, salami, chorizo, bangers, garlic sausage, frankfurters which should set you with enough know-how to start varying the recipe and create your own preferred flavours. Pickling

A straight forward guide to pickling all sorts of stuff from fish to lemons via onions and the occasional octopus. Herbs, pastes and infused oils and vinegars

A quick fizz around some curry pastes (Thai red and green), pesto, tapanade, tomato paste, truffle butter and various oils and vinegars. Nothing difficult and an encouragement to try your own rather than expensive shop bought jars. Fermenting

A chapter for the adventurous and those with understanding families. They deliberately omit beer and wine and wines and concentrate on foodstuffs. A good clear explanation of the principles and the need for hygiene and an indication of

the ideal temperatures for the process to work. They provide recipes for sauerkraut, kimchee, miso and black bean sauce. Sugar

An interesting chapter that doesn't just concentrate on jams and jellies but also includes marmalade, mango chutney, marrons glaces and crystallised violets. The instructions are comprehensive and clear. You shouldn't go wrong. Alcohol

Here they restrict themselves to soaking fruit in various spirits. Bottling and Canning

What a kerfuffle. Although interesting to know about I can't see the point of this unless you have no access to a freezer. If that was the case I would have a specialist manual of bottling/canning not this book. They provide all the info on how it works and the necessity of getting it right to avoid botulism. Nothing they describe couldn't be made and frozen which is far more convenient. Air exclusion

From now on it gets a bit thin.

Vacuum Packing - if you vacuum pack stuff it keeps longer, at least twice as long. Brilliant. Some data on length of preservation for food type would be useful.

There are also a few recipes involving confit and pate, although they say that confit de canard should be used within a fortnight. I thought it kept until the fat was broken; there's also potted shrimp, use of aspic and that's it. Freezing

You can freeze food and it keeps longer. This section gives advice about techniques for freezing in portions and individual pieces; info on blanching and freezing veg; and sugaring fruit. That's it. As with vacuum packing there's no info on keeping time and how long this can be extended by vacuum packing. There's nothing about meat or fish, I suppose because you just chuck it in and forget about it.

Useful addresses

The directory is a bit thin with only two suggested contacts, one in the UK, the other USA, under each preserving section.

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Acceptable but does not have a reference for dehydrators.

Preserved is written by Nick Sandler and Johnny Acton and published by Kyle Cathie Ltd - ISBN 1-85626-532-3

RRP £25 but available cheaper elsewhere (try The Book People)