Flo Domingue searches for muscadine among vines.

**Summertime's the perfect time for**

Canning in the Country

By Mary Swann

Flo Domingue gets her Christmas gift wrapping done long before December. Every year, right about this time, she cans fruits and vegetables harvested from her garden, creating preserves, jellies and pickles to be enjoyed by friends and family all year long.

"I love to do it because I love giving it away," she says. As she begins picking cucumbers from the vine, the former Lafayette clothing store owner explains her process of putting up "chow chow," a relish made with cucumbers, vinegar and pickle salt. "You ought to try this in gumbo," she says.

While searching for ripe vegetables, she's surrounded by cockatiels, parakeets, and peacocks in her manicured gardens, located on 16 acres of land just inside St. Landry Parish. Among the trees which provide her with fruit for canning are fig, cherry, crab apple and lime. Added to her crop are blueberry bushes, muscadine vines and peppers for making jelly.

Forty-eight pecan trees have just begun a new season, and they lead to the front of the property, which with screen's is a fish pond ideal with water lilies. All flowers and fruit are carefully cultivated by Domingue and her husband, Luke.

Reach for the last of the cucumbers, Domingue explains that earlier, she canned for several hours, stocking her pantry full—but that won't last long. She sends "care packages" across the country, and when she travels, she packs a few extra jars for gift giving.

She also enjoys strolling through the gardens with her grandchildren to pick berries for baking. A fresh batch of blueberry muffins... Sugar cookies dotted with cherries... Both are easy favorites for her granddaughters to bake. This special time is set aside for the children, and they look forward to spending it with her.

Domingue says her interests surrounding gardening and canning have evolved over the years. "I just started one day... I watched my mother doing this as I grew up and decided I would give it a shot. It worked, and now that I am retired and have the time to fool with it, I love it."

Cucumbers are picked for making relish.

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**Canning** recipes

Flo Domingue suggests the following methods for canning cucumbers, figs and making pepper jelly.

**Chow Chow** relish

- Cucumbers, unpeeled
- Pickle salt, water vinegar

Blend cucumbers in food processor, then soak in pickle salt and water. While mixture is soaking, boil vinegar. Drain cucumbers, removing as much water as possible. Sterilize jars and fill with pickle mixture. Add boiling vinegar, just to cover chow chow. Boil jar lids to soften rubber seals. Once lid is fastened on jar, turn over, lid side down, to seal.

Relish tastes delicious on hamburgers and in salad, or gumbo. Note: Mild or hot jalapeno peppers may be added in with cucumbers as desired.

**Pepper Jelly**

- 6 green jalapeno peppers or red hot peppers with seeds
- 1 bell pepper without seeds
- 1 cup white-cider vinegar
- 2 bottles Certo
- 2 or 3 teaspoons food coloring as desired

Grind or chop peppers (wear rubber gloves while preparing them). Combine peppers in saucepan with sugar and vinegar, and bring to a boil. Cook for about five minutes. Add certo. Mixture should get thick. Add food coloring as desired, (red and green at Christmas, purple and gold for Mardi Gras). Fill jars, seal and let cool. Serve on bagel or crackers with cream cheese.

**Fig Preserves**

- Two gallons figs
- One bottle Karo syrup
- One gallon sugar
- Cut and peel two gallons of figs. Cook down with one gallon sugar and Karo syrup until syrup is thick, about three hours. Fill jars and seal.

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Flo Domingue prepares 'Chow Chow' while canning at her home in St Landry.

Photos by Alex Ross.

Flo Domingue prepares 'Chow Chow' while canning at her home in St Landry.