



# MOTHER EARTH NEWS

GROW SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS • PAGE 24

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## Best Organic



Country Lore Readers' Tips to Live By

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## Attractive Labels Boost Homemade Sales

**D**o your friends and family tell you that your strawberry jam is so good you should sell it? Have you ever considered making some money off your pickles or salsa? Thanks to expanding food laws across the country, depending on where you live, you may now have an open sales opportunity to create such “nonhazardous food products” in your home kitchen for public sale. Just about every state in the country has a variation of what’s called a “cottage food law” that allows residents to create specific, nonhazardous food products made in home kitchens to sell at certain direct-to-the-consumer venues, such as farmers markets.

My husband and I produce small batches of sauerkraut, bread-and-butter pickles, and pickled pumpkin in our home kitchen for sale at farmers markets and community events. We quickly learned that while it’s important to have a quality, tasty product, it’s what’s on the outside of the jar—how our product looks—that often closes a sale at market.

Boost sales of your homemade food products with attractive labels and packaging that communicate the handcrafted quality of your value-added items. The fact that you made that jar of pickles by hand—crafted in small batches by you in your farmhouse or homestead kitchen, perhaps with your own organic

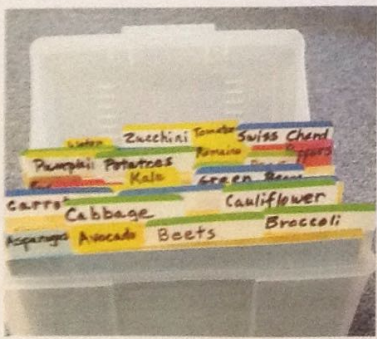


produce—should be a key selling point. This will differentiate your product from the mass-produced, commercial jars found on the shelves of a supermarket.

But don’t lose sales with products that look too home-spun. Ditch the handwritten labels affixed with packing tape. Instead, create packaging with a more professional look that showcases the handcrafted nature of your product while increasing sales and diversifying the revenue generated by your homestead enterprise.

## Organize Recipes from Asparagus to Zucchini

I love gardening and eating fresh vegetables. But, for me, it’s a real chore thinking up ways to use them. Too often, good food has wasted away in my fridge or on my counter.



One winter, after looking over a garden catalog, I brainstormed about how to get organized by rearranging my recipe file. Instead of traditional categories, such as soups, breads, and casseroles, the sections in my new system would list recipes alphabetically by individual vegetable: asparagus, cabbage, green beans, etc. So when I have zucchini to use, for example, I could just go right to that section.

It’s worked! Recently, I had a bunch of Swiss chard to use. Looking in my file, I found a forgotten recipe for hummus using Swiss chard stems! Who would have thought? Not me.

I still love eating veggies! Now, it’s an adventure digging into my recipe file for ways to serve them.

Susan Stith  
Wilmington, Delaware

## Cilantro: 2 Uses for the Table

Anyone who has grown cilantro to use with Mexican-style dishes knows how quickly it bolts and goes to seed. I grow cilantro close to my back door, which allows for easy last-minute picking to top my favorite fish tacos. This also means I can see the first stem beginning to bolt. My usual response is to rush to cut off that stem and thereby save the last few cilantro leaves. However, a busy schedule prevented me from cutting off the stem this past season, and the next time I looked at the plant, there was a display of tiny white flowers similar to baby’s breath. I paired the cilantro flowers with my garden zinnias and created an ideal table arrangement. Now, I make use of my cilantro leaves for Mexican dishes but also look forward to cilantro’s

TOP: JOHN D. IWANKO



Your state's cottage food law will give you the exact verbiage required on your label. In Wisconsin, the line reads: "This product was made in a home not subject to state licensing or inspection." Additionally, the label must include the name and address of the person who did the canning, the date of the canning, and the product's ingredients in descending amount by weight.

Despite these legal requirements, you can still craft attractive packaging. Most often, state requirements, like Wisconsin's, will specify what needs to be included but won't dictate the font size or how it specifically must appear on the package. This opens an opportunity to get creative and have some fun.

For example, we use 2-by-3 $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch Avery Print-to-the-Edge Glossy Oval Labels, which fit nicely on both half-pint and pint-sized jars. Then, we add the required state verbiage around the perimeter of the label (something you can readily do with the Avery template) that meets our state's requirement. This satisfies our legal requirements while allowing us to focus more on the actual product. Another option may be to place the legally required wording on the bottom of the jar so you don't cover up the appealing product inside.

We print crisp, attractive labels using our computer for time efficiency. However, we also add the jar number within each batch in a handwritten note on each label. This personal touch, similar to how an artist signs and numbers their prints, adds instant value to our product. We endeavor to let our customers know that what we make is limited, high-quality, and unique.

If every label isn't perfectly straight on the jar, that's OK. It will illustrate the "made by a food artisan" message. It will also give you

a story to tell your potential customers; maybe your kids help package your jars, or it's a fun activity you do with elderly relatives. Get personal and authentic in why your product is different and special.

Adding some color and texture to your jars will differentiate your product at market and enable you to communicate your brand. What message do you want to share about your farm, and how can that play out in the packaging of your product? Are you more minimalist and modern, or playful and informal? Additional elements, such as ribbon or fabric, will help show potential customers what you're all about.

The fact that we produce small batches of these high-acid products works to our advantage. We can experiment with different packaging and see what sells, as well as adapt elements to different times of year. You could do the same by using a holiday-inspired topper print for winter markets. And, of course, if a particular packaging scheme doesn't work, you'll never be at a loss—because you can always eat and savor the product yourself!

To help support you in upping your jars' appeal, my husband and I put together a free 16-page downloadable "Labeling Guide and Toolkit for Creating Canned Food Products that Sell"

that you can access at <https://goo.gl/7R6vxJ>. This guide covers step-by-step instructions on improved labels, creative packaging, and farmers market displays. We also have a book, *Homemade for Sale* (available on Page 96), which goes into more detail on everything from business structure to kitchen organization to marketing for beginners.

Lisa Kivirist

Browntown, Wisconsin

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tiny, white flowers as an addition to our table arrangements.

Sharon Moe Furl  
Rio Rancho, New Mexico

## Reuse Curbside Compostables

I have a garden that came with well-established, invasive Bermuda grass. My favorite means of suppression involves a series of reuses. My wife and I gather bagged pine straw and leaves left at the side of the road for garbage pickup. (Huntsville, our hometown, doesn't have a garden-waste compost program yet.) We use the discarded pine needles to help us establish and maintain walking paths. They feel great under bare feet! We take the leaves and spread them on planting beds as mulch to revitalize the soil. Here in the South, leaves decay quick-

ly, so we often lay down cardboard first to suppress the grass longer than the leaves could alone. Eventually, the grass dies! Be aware that pine needles on cardboard will roll, so lay a thin layer of newspaper or leaves underneath to make the pine straw a bit more stable for walking on.

Rinse the plastic bags that the pine needles and leaves were in and hang them up to dry, or hang them and let the rain wash 'em. After they're clean and dry, we keep our bags to hold paper to be recycled, as is required for our curbside pickup. That's four items—leaves, pine straw,

