

Five Tips for Busting Stress



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Stress – we all have it, whether it's at work, home or places in between. There are times when we feel especially stressed due to a bad interaction or everyday hassles like traffic. No one's life is completely stress free, but regular negative stress can keep us from feeling and performing at our best; therefore, it's important that we learn how to manage it.

There are activities we can incorporate into our daily lives to manage or prevent a build-up of negative stress. These include things such as regular physical activity, getting enough sleep, meditation, etc. However, there are times when we need in-the-moment stress stoppers. Consider these five ideas.

- 1.) Count to 10 before you react. Even a short pause can help you think clearly.
- 2.) Leave the situation and go for a walk. A change of

scenery can be beneficial in thinking the situation through.

3.) Break down big problems into smaller parts, then you can take it one step at a time.

4.) Turn on relaxing music or an inspirational podcast.

5.) Take a few slow, deep breaths. To do this, try the breathe-deep challenge. This challenge invites you to slow down and breathe deeply any time you need a moment to defuse a stressful situation. Count to 4 as you breathe in. Hold for 4 counts. Breathe out for 4 counts. Repeat four or more times, or until you feel your body un-clench a bit. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Let your belly expand. Relax your body as you breathe.

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Jack-o'-lanterns: Prevent Your Carved Creation from Becoming a Fungal Fiasco



Carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns is an art form that comes in all shapes, sizes and levels of difficulty. The final product (usually) makes the pumpkin carver proud and anxious to display his or her work. However, often just a few days later, the artistic creation may start to wither and rot, and eventually, mold will take over. Why does this happen?

When you carve a pumpkin, it exposes the insides, making it more susceptible to infection through air flow. The environment (temperature, sunlight, etc.) can also be a factor in the pumpkin's quality.

Molds are a fungal micro-organism that have the potential to live everywhere. These fungi release tiny, lightweight spores that allow them to travel through the air. They can then infect and cause carved pumpkins to shrivel, soften and start to grow fuzzy, grey mold. Some common interior molds include *Cladosporium*, *Penicillium*, *Aspergillus*, and *Alternaria*.

Consider these methods to help preserve your carved pumpkin:

1. Thoroughly wash your pumpkin before cutting into it.

2. Sterilize spoons, knives or other carving tools before use, especially between pumpkin carving.

3. Remove all of the pumpkin's insides to reduce the surface area where potential fungi can grow.

4. Dip, wash or spray your finished carving with a 10 percent bleach solution. This will kill any microorganisms on your pumpkin.

5. Rub the cut areas with petroleum jelly, which helps lock in the moisture and slow the drying process.

6. Consider using an electric light or glow stick instead of a candle. This will prevent the gourd from "cooking" and spoiling faster.

Click here to see a gallery of the fungi that can infect your carved pumpkin:

<https://dkphoto.photoshelter.com/.../Molds-.../G0000G0ne6NTk5fs/>

Click here to learn more about pumpkin production:

<https://vegetableguide.usu.edu/production/cucumber-pumpkin-squashproduction/varietyselection>

Click here to learn more about mold and mildews: https://utahpests.usu.edu/.../p.../pdf/mold-mildew_pestpress.pdf

Ask an Expert by: Nick Volesky, Utah State University Extension vegetable IPM associate

Tips for Safely Preserving the Harvest



If you plan to preserve the harvest this year, it's good to review the basics so your final products have maximum quality, shelf life and safety. The advantages of home canning are lost when jars fail to seal properly, when food spoils or when flavor, texture, color and nutrients deteriorate during storage. (USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning). Consider these tips to achieve the best results.

*** Quality in equals quality out.**

Examine foods carefully for freshness and wholesomeness. Discard diseased and moldy food; however, small bruises or lesions in food can be trimmed away.

It is unrealistic to assume under- or over-ripe fruits or droopy vegetables will perk up as a result of

preserving. The same holds true for bruising or discoloration. Also, just because a food is grown and can be eaten fresh doesn't guarantee it will hold up well as a canned or frozen product. Keep in mind that some foods work especially well when dehydrated or freeze dried.

*** Be mindful of shelf life.**

As a general rule, unopened home-canned foods have a shelf life of 1 year and should be used before 2 years – which probably leaves you wondering if you should throw away your home-canned foods that are 3 years old or more. The answer is not necessarily. If proper guidelines for processing (including high altitude changes) and storage have been followed and the jar still has a strong seal, safety will not be the issue, rather it will be quality. After one year, textures and flavors start to break down as do color and nutritional value. The food may not look or taste its best, but it will still be safe to eat. More information can be found in the USU Extension fact sheet at <https://extension.usu.edu/foodstorage/howdoi/canned>.

With frozen foods, the enemies of longevity include: freezer temperature not being cold enough; not using freezer containers, heavy plastic bags or wrap to prevent freezer burn; or the formation of ice crystals, which is moisture extracted from the food. Even with optimal conditions, frozen foods are best when consumed within 6 to 12 months.

Dehydrated foods are affected by temperature and moisture along with exposure to air. Any of these conditions will shorten shelf life and may allow mold to grow on the surface of foods. It's best to include an oxygen absorber packet inside each container to extend the shelf life beyond a few months.

*** Make food safety your top priority.**

Most bacteria, yeasts and molds are difficult to remove from

food surfaces. Washing fresh food reduces their numbers only slightly. Peeling root crops, underground stem crops and tomatoes reduces their numbers greatly, and blanching also helps. But the two vital safety controls are the method of canning and making sure the recommended processing times found in research-based food preservation manuals or online sources are used. If you don't know if a recipe you have is research-based, contact your local USU Extension office for guidance.

You may be using an approved resource for your recipe, but make certain it contains information for processing at high altitudes. Generally speaking, pressure canning low-acid foods such as meats, vegetables and some tomato-based products requires an increase of pressure by 13-15 lbs. using dial- or weighted-gauges as insurance against botulism food poisoning. Water-bath canning requires increased processing times; generally, an additional 10 minutes. Tomatoes are in a category all by themselves and without exception, must be prepared as recommended, including increasing the acid level by adding bottled lemon juice.

Take the time to learn and incorporate key safety tips when preserving foods at home. It will add protection to your family and will guarantee the highest, longest-lasting food quality.

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October Yard and Garden

Checklist



Fall is officially here, and it's time to put the yard and garden to bed. Here are tips from the USU Extension Gardeners Almanac to help. Included are links to fact sheets and videos for further information.

- Consider adding a smaller structure such as a low tunnel or a larger high tunnel to extend your growing season.
- Learn how and when to harvest winter squash. Store winter squash in a cool, 50-55 F, dry location.
- Plant garlic cloves from mid-October through early November.
- [Click here](#) for a list of fall cleanup chores and good landscape practices.
- Remove vegetable plants from the garden once harvest is complete to reduce overwintering sites for insect pests.

- Protect tomatoes from early frost by covering the plants with a blanket or tarp.
- Overwinter carrots, beets and parsnips in ground, by placing mulch over them. This prevents the ground from freezing.
- Rototill leaves, compost and/or manure into the vegetable garden to enhance the soil microbe activity.
- Limit pruning of roses to the heading back of excessively long canes to prevent damage from heavy snow loads.
- Cut back ornamental grasses in snow-prone areas once the foliage has dried down, otherwise leave them until spring and enjoy the vertical accent during winter.
- Plant spring blooming bulbs through early November.
- Planting trees and shrubs in the fall enhances root establishment.
- Dig tender perennials such as gladiolas, dahlias, begonias and canna lilies after the foliage has died down and store them in a cool, 45-50 F, dry location.
- Protect trunks of young trees from winter cracking by wrapping them with a white reflective tree wrap.
- Dig and remove annual flower plantings.
- Plant cold hardy annuals: pansy, primrose, kale and ornamental cabbage.
- Prune out (to the ground) raspberry canes that have fruited.
- Fall is the best time to control tough perennial weeds such as field bindweed (morning glory). [Click here for a list of weed control options.](#)

- The last mowing of the season should be 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches high to minimize disease problems.
- Apply a quick-release nitrogen fertilizer late fall, after the last mowing (late October – early November) for early green up next spring.
- [Click here](#) for a listing of the average first and last frost dates in locations around Utah.

Pests and Problems:

- Send diseased vegetable plants and leaves to the local landfill.
- Use burlap or other soft materials to wrap evergreens to prevent snow breakage.
- Treat for Coryneum blight in stone fruits (cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots and plums) at 50 percent leaf drop.
- Clean up and discard all fallen fruit to reduce overwintering sites for disease and insect pests.