

Beach Preserves

by Rosanne Bane



"Beach Preserves" keep memories alive and sparkling for years.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROSANNE BANE

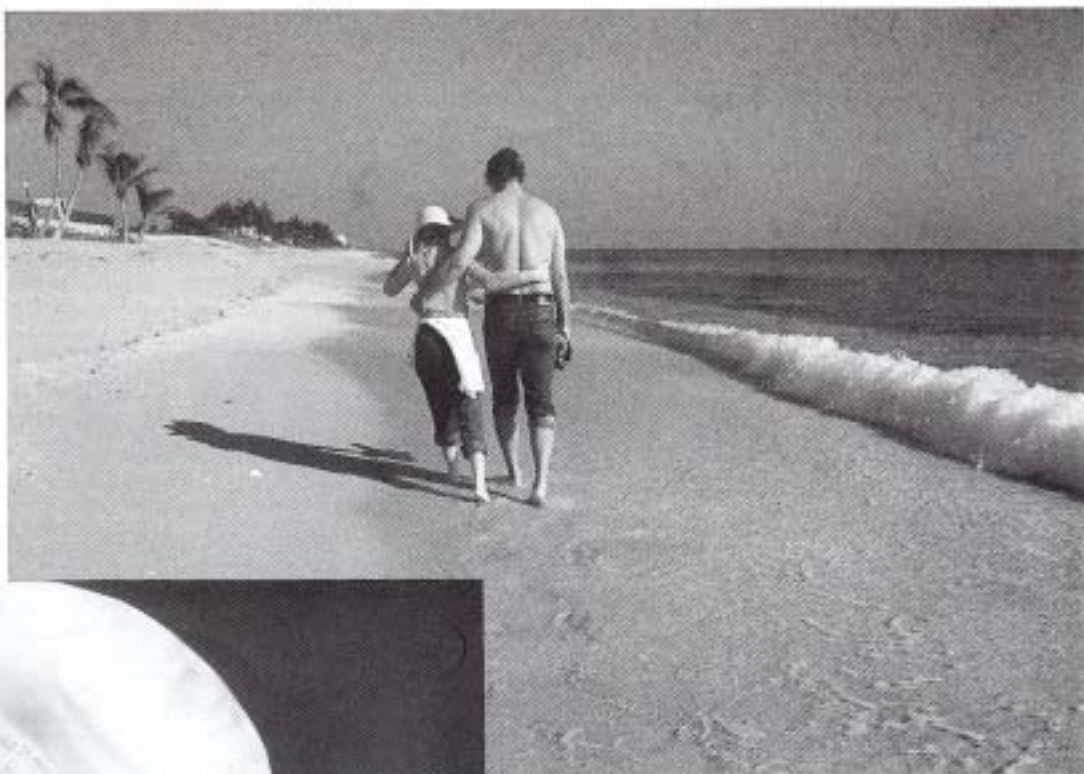
Kids of all ages love to collect rocks and shells, especially along the beach or lakeshore of a vacation spot. But somehow, when the water is left behind and the rocks and shells dry, the shimmering jades and roses, sparkling whites, and variegated browns often become dull and uninteresting. The treasures that delighted us so on the shore lose their power to remind us of the pleasant hours spent collecting them.

Luckily there is a way to preserve those beach memories—by canning your rocks and shells! Simple Mason jars will keep your rocks and shells shimmering and serve as a long-time reminder of your vacation.

The first step, of course, is collecting the rocks and shells. Be sure to gather a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. If you're with small children or first time collectors, you can surreptitiously add to their collection to guarantee variations. Add small pieces of driftwood and sand or gravel. Gather a supply of local water, if it is relatively clear. Keep in mind the size of your preserving jar and its opening.

While you probably don't want to take your jar to the shore, for fear of breaking it there, plan on arranging and filling it before you leave. Layer the sand or gravel in the bottom of the jar. Next, place a few of the larger rocks or shells into it. Add the rest of the rocks or shells, placing them carefully so that you can see their most interesting aspects. Children may be able to get their hands inside the jar to arrange their rocks and shells, but adults often must use a stick or spoon. Wedge the driftwood in a strategic spot. You may find that you gathered too many large rocks and shells or too few light colored ones, and this is an excellent excuse to take another stroll along the water.

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Shell and rock collecting are the perfect excuse for a final walk by the shore.

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After everyone in your party has gotten their rocks and shells arranged to suit them, add enough water to fill each jar completely. Screw the metal lid on tightly and wrap the jars in towels to prevent breakage on the trip home. Keep the jars upright as much as possible, since rolling around may change the arrangement you worked so hard to achieve.

At home, heat your jars in a water bath, using a kettle that will hold enough water to cover the bottom three-fourths of the jars. Heat until the water boils and then simmer for about fifteen minutes. Try not to allow the jars to touch. This "cooking" kills any algae that would discolor the inside of your jars and seals the jars shut. You'll know your "beach preserves" are done when the bubble on the lid sinks in. To avoid cracking the glass, be careful not to jiggle the jars while they're hot.

Many jars have a two-part metal lid. You can loosen the outer ring and slip a circle cut to size from a photo or postcard under its rim as a reminder of where this particular jar of beach preserves came from.

Even if you think this will be an activity just for the kids, bring along a jar for each member of your traveling party. Adults, with or without children, find this an enjoyable and relaxing hobby that provides a treasured memento that can decorate desks, bookshelves or counter-tops for years.

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