

# Well Preserved

## Drying Fruits, Vegetables

This is the first of a three-part series on preserving foods by drying. Dried foods are tasty, nutritious, lightweight, and easy to store and use. The energy input is less than what is needed to freeze or can, and the storage space is minimal compared with that needed for canning jars and freezer containers.

Drying is one of the oldest methods of preserving foods. Throughout history, the sun, the wind, and a smoky fire were used to remove water from fruits, meats, grains, and herbs. Increasing the temperature of the food makes its moisture evaporate, and air moving over the food carries the moisture away. A balance of temperature and humidity is needed for successful drying of foods. High humidity and low temperatures can cause food to dry too slowly encouraging the growth of microorganisms.

Temperatures that are too high will cause the food to form a hard shell that traps moisture inside and cause the food to spoil.

Select a method of drying suitable for the product and where you live. While many commercially dried foods are sun dried, this method is suitable only where there is low humidity. Sun drying does not work well here in central Pennsylvania.

Room drying works well for herbs, nuts in the shell, or partially dried high-acid sweet fruits such as apple rings if there is adequate heat and air movement. Air conditioning may reduce temperatures in your home too low for drying foods.

Oven drying works well if you can set your oven to a temperature of 140 to 150 degrees F. Meats can be dried as high as 160 degrees F. Higher temperatures than this will cook the food in-

stead of drying it. Open the oven door two to three inches to allow moisture to escape. A convection oven works well because it combines the low heat with a fan to move the air.

Commercially made and homemade food dehydrators give a better quality dried product than other methods. Microwave ovens can be used to dry small quantities of herbs.

As with other methods of preserving food, the end quality will only be as good as the food you start with. Select ripe fruit for drying. Trim away any bruised spots.

Cut foods into 1/8 to 1/2 inch slices. The higher the water content, the larger you should make the slice. Small slices of high-moisture foods, such as watermelon, would disappear when all the moisture has evaporated. Peel fruits and vegetables that would

normally be peeled. Although apples and pears sometimes have the skin left on, the skin tends to toughen as it dries.

Apples, pears, peaches, and apricots are better when pretreated. Pretreatment reduces oxidation making the product more appetizing, giving a better color, reducing vitamin loss, and lengthening shelf life. Place cut fruits in a solution of ascorbic acid or in fruit juices containing ascorbic acid such as orange, lemon, lime or pineapple juice. Soak five minutes before placing on trays to dry. Do not keep cut fruit in a holding solution for more than one hour. Other methods of pretreating include syrup blanching, sulfating, and blanching.

Syrup blanching involves simmering the prepared fruit for 10 minutes in a sugar syrup (1 cup sugar, 1 cup white corn syrup, and 2 cups water) and then letting it stand in the hot syrup 30 to 45 minutes before draining, rinsing, and placing on drying trays. Syrup blanching fruit is sweeter but also stickier than fruit treated by other methods. Soaking fruits in a solution of one tablespoon sodium bisulfite in one gallon water for five to 10 minutes also slows oxidation. Sulfating isn't recommended for use by individuals on restricted sodium diets or who have asthmatic or respiratory conditions.

Some fruits such as blueberries and cranberries need to be dipped into boiling water to check (crack) the skins. Be careful not to let the fruit in the boiling water too long or the fruit will turn to mush.

Blanching is recommended for asparagus, green beans, broccoli, cauliflower, corn, eggplant, potatoes, and peas to slow the enzymatic reactions which will continue during drying and storage. Blanching also softens the cell



structure, allowing moisture to escape and allows the vegetable to rehydrate faster.

Blanched vegetables should be drained and placed on the dryer trays. The heat from the blanching will give them a head start in the drying process. Onions, garlic, peppers, and herbs do not need blanching.

Some foods dry much better than others. According to Leanna DeLong, author of How to Dry Foods, fruits that dry well are apples, apricots, cherries, citrus peel, coconuts, dates, figs, grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, pineapples, and prune plums. Some fruits not recommended for drying include avocados, berries with seeds such as raspberries, citrus fruits, crab apples, olives, pomegranates, and quince.

Chili peppers were the only vegetable to receive an excellent rating for drying. Carrots, corn, garlic, horseradish, onions, parsley, parsnips, peas, green beans, and potatoes received a good rating. Some vegetables including brussels sprouts, lettuce, radishes, and winter squash are not recommended for drying. Next week we will look at storing and using dried foods. The third week we will look at how to make fruit leathers and jerky.

If you have food preservation questions, a home economist is available to answer questions on Wednesdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m., call (717) 394-6851 or write Penn State Cooperative Extension, Lancaster County, 1383 Arcadia Rd., Rm.1, Lancaster, PA, 17601.

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## Milk Buds To Perform At West Lampeter Fair

LAMPETER (Lancaster Co.) — West Lampeter Community Fair is planning to do some "hitching up" during its annual three-day run, scheduled Sept. 25, 26 and 27 at the Lampeter Community Grounds.

The "hitching" that fair planners have on the docket of this year's events is not some sort of collective wedding ceremony but special appearances of the "Milk Buds."

A family of ponies, the Milk Buds features an eight-pony hitch which has appeared at fairs and exhibitions across the country, promoting milk and family values. Accompanying the ponies is the Schottler family, Somerset, Wis., who not only travel with the pony hitch, but often add music during their performances along the way.

The Schottler family are dairy farmers from the northwestern part of Wisconsin and have found this promotional effort to be a popular one with fairgoers.

"We want to promote what we think is the best beverage. We want to sell milk," says John Schottler of the Milk Buds appearances. "We can exhibit or perform just about anywhere."

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