



Kitchen Stewardship Guide to Dehydrating Fruits & Veggies

A simple tutorial from Kitchen Stewardship



How to Dehydrate Fruit

Dehydrating fruit is such a great option for long-term storage without filling your freezer. Most make great snack foods and can stay in your diaper bag or desk drawer for a long time! Dehydrating apples has become my new favorite fall pastime.

When I was learning how to dehydrate fresh fruit I tried a few different ways to “pre-treat” some fruits, like apples. When buying dried fruit, you’ll notice that some packages claim “sulfate free!” while others have “potassium sulfate” in their ingredients list. Some fruits need to be pre-treated before dehydrating in order to make them taste better, look better, or last longer.

Generally, you want to avoid potassium sulfate, just because it’s one more chemical you don’t need. For home dehydrating, I didn’t want to have to seek out any fancy ingredients. Luckily I read about some alternative pre-treatment options using ingredients I had in my kitchen.

How to Dehydrate Apples

I tried dehydrating sliced apples without any pretreatment when I was first dabbling with my friend’s food dehydrator, and I was so disappointed. The end result was very chewy and not at all tasty to eat as a snack.

Over time, I found that sprinkling a bit of cinnamon on the apple slices makes a big difference in the flavor, even if you don’t do anything else to pretreat them.

Two different, simple pretreatments:

Steam for 3-4 minutes

This was so easy to do with a steamer basket, and the end result was very light, less chewy than the other version, and a very fun snack that my whole family liked. Just be sure to rinse with cold water when the time is up and blot dry before arranging on the food dehydrator tray.

OR

Soak in lemon or lime or pineapple juice and water.

1:4 ratio. Also easy to do; I used the same pretreat liquid, 1/4 cup lime juice and 1 cup water, for apples and bananas since I wasn't drying a big quantity. These apples are more dense and chewy, but I didn't notice the flavor of the citrus fruit coming through too much, so that was a good thing.

My apples were finished in less than 6 hours,

How do you tell when the apples are finished dehydrating?

If you can't squeeze any moisture out when you pinch the fruit, that's a fairly accurate sign of being 100% finished. If you're still unsure, put the apples into a plastic bag, box or glass jar right away while warm, and if condensation forms on the inside, you need to dry them out a bit more.

Oven Dried Crispy Apple Chips

Ingredients:

- apples (2 for a full oven)
- cinnamon (optional)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees F.
2. Line 2 cookie sheets with parchment paper.
3. Wash, quarter and core apples.
4. Slice apples using a mandolin for consistent thickness.
5. Distribute apples in a single layer on the parchment paper. Do not let slices rest on the baking pan because they stick!
6. Sprinkle with cinnamon, if desired.
7. Bake for about 1 hour in the 250 degree oven.
8. Rotate cookie sheets.
9. Reduce temperature to 200 or less. Continue baking.
10. Check slices after the next half hour and then more frequently, reducing oven temp if desired. (For the thickness of my apple slices, I bake for an hour or so more. It's not exact timing because apples have different amounts of moisture and the thickness of the slices affects the drying.)
11. If you choose, you may loosen slices from the parchment paper during the baking time.
12. I recommend testing one by letting it cool. If it is crunchy, remove all from oven.
13. The apple slices can burn quicker than you think. Some slices may look/act crispier than others and can be removed to cool and finish the crisping.
14. If apple slices seem pliable after cooling, put them back in the oven.
15. Enjoy the crispy chips with a burst of apple flavor!

Notes

- Two large apples, sliced, fill my cookie sheets as full as possible in a single layer.
- We prefer Gala and other sweet apples rather than Granny Smith apples.
- When using the mandolin, I like resting the apple's cut edge flat against the blade to get the widest slice, and then slicing till the quarter is down to nothing or next to nothing.
- The parchment paper may be used repeatedly. I shake off the cinnamon, fold it and store it in the cupboard till next time.
- The length of baking time is dependent on the thickness of the slices. Slices should probably be about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in thickness. If too thin, they burn quickly or practically disappear as they dry.
- When I maintained the 250 temperature, I could burn slices in a matter of 2 or 3 minutes. I would rather the process take a little longer in time with a better outcome.
- In a full dehydrator, it takes about 36 hours at 125-135F to get all the way to "crispy" chips, although dried apple slices at about 12-18 hours are good, too. Just not quite as addicting.

Apple Cinnamon Fruit Rolls

Ingredients:

- Applesauce

Directions:

1. Spread your homemade applesauce, heavy on the cinnamon, onto parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.
2. Bake at 200-250F until thoroughly dry, usually 1-2 hours. Watch closely so it doesn't burn.
3. If you do have a dehydrator, make the rolls on unbleached parchment paper or trays on about 135F for 8-12 hours or until fully dried but not quite crispy.

How to Dehydrate Bananas

My kids didn't like the dried bananas! So sad. My husband can't get enough of them, but for the kids and I, the flavor gets really concentrated and the bananas are very chewy, and it's just not our thing. My son

initially said, "It tastes like banana pancakes," then on the second taste decided "Yuck."

Pretreating does help them not get so brown, so it's worth a try on one banana while you're dehydrating other things, just to see if your family likes them.

They're ugly without the lemon juice, but my husband still likes them, so I often skip that step.

Pretreat with a citrus soak

Just like you would for apples, like I described above. Stop dehydrating when leathery. You can also continue dehydrating until you get banana chips if you slice them thinly enough, which would be a different texture to experiment with.

Dehydrating took about 10 hours. Chips would likely take 15-20 hours. With a full food dehydrator, expect longer times, like 15 hours for dried bananas. If you go too long on accident and don't like the tough texture, keep going until you get to crunchy "chips" as long as you sliced thinly.

How much to use?

It takes about 6-8 bananas to fill a tray, although this all depends on how thinly you slice them. With apples, it's amazing how fast your tray fills up. With bananas, it's incredible how many you can fit!

How to Dehydrate Strawberries

It couldn't be simpler: slice and dry. Mine generally take about 6-8 hours, but if you go overboard, they're still tasty, just a little more chewy/crunchy. Unless you are a perfectly consistent slicer, you'll probably have to remove some strawberries before they're all 100% finished. Your berries may take longer than mine, too, if you slice them thicker than 1/8-1/4".

Fruit rolls

Particularly if you've been lucky enough to pick a bunch of strawberries, you'll have some that are getting mushy before you can process them. A fruit roll or fruit leather is a perfect way to be able to use up on-its-way-out fruit, and the preparation is generally easier than any other method of preservation.

How much to use?

You can fit at least half a quart of strawberries to fill a tray when slicing (again depends on thickness) but my favorite because it's SO fast and easy, is definitely the fruit rolls. Expect to use about 2 quarts for every 3 trays (these don't usually pour as thickly as applesauce).

Directions:

1. Wash fruit.
2. Puree.
3. Pour onto dehydrator sheets or parchment paper* about 1/8-1/4-inch thick. (Never waxed paper!)
4. Dehydrate at about 135F for 6-12 hours.

Cool trick: You can even leave the leaves on the strawberries when you dehydrate them. I'm not kidding. Just wash the berries, throw them in the blender, get 'em mashed to a pulp so you can't see the green stuff anymore, and pour carefully onto parchment paper.

Notes:

- You rarely need to add water while pureeing fruit for fruit rolls, but if you do, add slowly.
- You don't need sweetener, but if you want to add it, use sparingly.
- The fruit rolls/fruit leather should last fine at room temperature for over a year.
- Huge important note on parchment paper – cheap stuff won't work. It sticks to the fruit leather. You really can reuse and reuse. Once strawberries stain it, I still use it for baking messy things or whatever. The color stays, but the flavor doesn't. It's coated with a bit of silicone, which is why the fruit rolls release differently than cheap parchment.
- You can fill the entire dehydrator – and should to be eco-friendly and frugal.
- If your dehydrator is in the basement like mine is, carry the blender to the machine, then pour. Don't try to carry trays – even one at a time – full of poured fruit puree anywhere.
- The fruit leather is done when you can peel the fruit roll off the parchment paper without any stickiness.
- Check the very center – if your finger gets any fruit at all on it, dehydrate longer.
- Tear the fruit leather and squeeze – if you see any moisture droplets, dehydrate longer.
- If there's any condensation on the inside of your storage bags in the first few hours, they're not all the way dry.
- If you over-dry, it just becomes a bit crunchy, but the fruit rolls will never “burn” or compromise in quality. Crunchy is still tasty!

If you like to see it to believe it, [here's a how-to fruit leather video](#) my son helped me make.

How to Dehydrate Cranberries

Pretreatment for cranberries is absolutely necessary.

Freeze, then drop in boiling water for 30 seconds, then dip in cold water.

Making the Best of Basics instructions call for freezing the cranberries, then 30 seconds in boiling water, then a cold water bath. The point is to get the skins to crack so that the moisture can be released in the dehydrator.

The cranberries took about 20-24 hours. You really need to watch this fruit closely, because if they get too dried out, they're completely hard and have zero taste. If they get slightly overdone, they're chewy – like eating waxed paper – and have almost no taste. And if you try to compensate and assume that a dried cranberry that looks about like a raisin is “good enough”, they may get moldy.

It about killed me to throw away two whole boxes, about 3 bags, of cranberries because I messed this up and they molded! You may need to take some of the home dried cranberries out while the others catch up.

How to Dehydrate Cherries

Since cherries are already a bit complicated to prepare because you have to pit every one individually, it's nice that they need no pre-treatment for drying. Simply halve, pit, and arrange the cherry halves, skin side down, on the trays. Mine took about 20 hours to finish drying. They weren't as good as the Traverse City dried cherries that we get every year for Christmas from my grandparents, but those are tart cherries, and I only had black cherries. You could add a sprinkling of sugar or sweetener if you so desire.

One year, we picked and dehydrated cherries and that time they were finished and delicious in 12 hours. I added sugar to two of the five trays, but realized after tasting the finished product that I really didn't need to. Like cranberries, cherries are another fruit you'll want to watch very, very closely and use the bag test for doneness. Chewy is great, crunchy... not so much.

How much to use?

A 9-tray dehydrator will take about 8-10 pounds of cherries (3-4 quarts).

How to Know if Food is Fully Dehydrated?

When you think a food is finished drying out, put a few pieces in a plastic baggie and fold it over. If there's any condensation on the inside of the bag after a few minutes, keep drying them out! Once you package the food for storage (I use glass jars as often as I can, but I do rely on plastic bags, too), keep an eye on it over the next day. If you see any moisture collecting on the inside, get it back in the food dehydrator, stat! You can check to see if the pieces come apart after being pressed together tightly. If so, they're done.

Can I Dehydrate Different Fruits at the Same Time?

You bet. Since fruits don't have much of a permeating odor, feel free to put many different fruits together in your food dehydrator. If it's new to you, this is a great way to try a variety to see what your family likes. All fruits dehydrate at 135 degrees F. Start the first hour at 145F to get things moving along faster without killing any enzymes.

How to Dehydrate Veggies

Dehydrating veggies, at least the ones I've attempted, is so simple: Wash, cut in even pieces, dehydrate and store.

The hardest part about dehydrating veggies, for me, is figuring out how to use them and then remembering to do it. I'm a big fan of making veggie chips, which are like a healthier version of potato chips, crispy and salty and full of nutrients. They make a great snack.

I most often dehydrate peppers, zucchini, tomatoes, and greens because those are the items that (1) I really want to have on hand all year (2) are plentiful at the Farmer's Market and (3) won't fit in my freezer.

Dehydrated Veggie Chips

1. Slice as thinly as possible.
2. Toss in a little oil (any kind) and salt.
3. Dehydrate at about 135F (preserves some enzymes) for 6-24hours. (The thickness makes a big difference here.)
4. To test if they're done, allow a few to cool for 30-60 minutes. The chips always firm up once cooled.
5. Fully dehydrated vegetables will store for many months at room temperature. Break one in half and squeeze it to see if you got all the moisture out, or store a few warm ones in a plastic bag, and if there's condensation on the inside of the bag, they need more time to dry.

One last note: I don't recommend bothering with carrots, which turn into shriveled up little balls of toughness.

Dehydrated Greens

1. Wash greens thoroughly and remove the ribs.
2. Put a little water in a large pot and get it boiling.
3. Fill your steamer basket as full as possible with washed greens.
4. Set a timer for 2:30 (2 minutes, 30 seconds).
5. Lift the greens out with a slotted spoon or a couple forks and toss them onto a clean towel to sort of dry.
6. Refill the steamer basket and start the timer over. until all your greens are steamed.
7. Pat dry with a tea towel or clean dish towel. You can roll up a bunch and gently shake/compress to get the most water off, but don't do anything fancy.
8. Spread in a (mostly) single layer on dehydrator trays.
9. Set dehydrator to 135F (anything from 95-150F should work just fine!) for about 2-3 hours.
10. Unlike fruits, which may get too tough (but still edible) if you over dehydrate, it's pretty hard to mess up greens. They're going to be crispy or crispy, no matter what.
11. **Store the dried out greens in any sort of airtight container** at room temperature. Mine are just in a plastic zippered bag, and I also crushed some right in the bag with my hands to make handy dandy "greens flakes" that I can sprinkle into scrambled eggs, soups, or casseroles.
12. For greens powder (to add to smoothies) simply blend the dried greens in a high powered blender.

Dehydrated Zucchini

1. Shred the zucchini (use a food processor or grater).
2. Spread 2-3 cups on a dehydrating tray. Make sure to lay down parchment paper or the solid tray that comes with your dehydrator.
3. Dehydrate at 115°F if you want to preserve the raw enzymes.
4. Dehydrate until it is dry and crunchy (so no moisture remains). This may be a few hours, it may be longer — so many factors can influence this.
5. Store in a sealed container, like a mason jar with screw-top lid.

Helpful Hint 1: When you're adding dehydrated shredded zucchini to spaghetti sauce (or other sauce-focused dishes), it's not even necessary to rehydrate the zucchini with water. You can toss in a few crunchy handfuls and it will soften as the sauce cooks.

Helpful Hint 2: If you plan to add it to a drier dish (like stuffed peppers), consider rehydrating it with warm water for a few minutes in a bowl so it doesn't accidentally stay crunchy. Simply drain and toss it in your recipe!

Helpful Hint 3: If you're worried about the zucchini being detectable, crush it in your hands before you dump it in the pot.

Helpful Hint 4: Can I share a secret? If you already have bags and bags of frozen shredded zucchini in your freezer, it's not too late to dehydrate them! Simply thaw and drain – they'll dehydrate perfectly!

Helpful Hint 5: You can also slice and halve zucchini rounds and dry them the same way.

How to Use Dried Veggies

Tomatoes

I slice and dry Romas until they are completely crispy. Some I store as is, and I toss them into chili and use them, re-hydrated, on pizza for a bit of a fake-out sun-dried tomato imitation.

You can make your own canned tomato paste and sauce with dried tomato powder (blend dried tomatoes in a high powered blender) as follows:

- paste – 1:1 powder to water
- sauce – 1:3 powder to water
- soup – 1 part powder 1 part water and 2 parts cream

I've also just dumped some powder into my chili when it looked like it needed a little boost.

Zucchini

Some folks munch on dried zucchini like chips, but I'm not a huge fan. I tend to toss zucchini into about anything liquid, like soup, chili or even burritos. It's one of the foods I freeze regularly as well. I would recommend slicing each round in half, as the re-hydrated pieces are a bit more chewy, so smaller is better.

Greens

Greens are plentiful and inexpensive at the farmers market almost all year round, depending on where you live. I like to use the dehydrated greens and green powder to toss into smoothies, soups, and anywhere I think I can hide a bit of extra nutrition.

Veggies

If you're putting dried veggies into a soup or chili that will cook a while (at least an hour), you're pretty safe just tossing them in. The texture will be best, however, if you follow these directions:

- Place the dried food into a bowl
- Pour boiling water over the dried food (best to add *water to food*, not food to water)
- Allow to rehydrate until plumped up, between 10-60 minutes, depending on the thickness of the food and the purpose you need it for.



Check out all of the details on
dehydration at Kitchen
Stewardship [here!](#)

Fruit & Veggie Dehydration