

Food Drying, Storage and Usage Tips

Foods that work well:

- Casseroles, stews, soup bases with thick sauces
- Grains & beans (but test them to be sure they rehydrate in a timely way)
- Thick sauces or purees that can be served over ramen, instant rice, mashed potatoes or polenta – or turned into soup at camp!
- Deli-counter Rotisserie chicken, pressure-cooked, or canned meats, lean meats. Meats should be cooked prior to drying, unless pretreated with sodium mixture, as for jerky. If using meats with fat content, such as sausage, remove fats during cooking and press between paper towels after cooking and again, after dehydrating.
- Vegetables and vegetable mixtures (fine dice or uniform sizes) – (freezer packs with sauce or butter packs are great!)
- Fresh Fruits
- Yogurt
- Some dry cheese, such as fresh parmesan.

Key to success is uniform sizes. Small pieces work best for some foods.

Foods that don't work as well:

- Large pieces – the outside dried before the inside
- Recipes with high oil content, or oil-packed (fish)
- Smelly foods – make the whole house smelly when dehydrating
- Thin soups (thicken the soup before dehydrating it)

Layered dishes (enchiladas, lasagna) ok, but must be chopped up

Tips for successful dehydrated meals

- Chop or puree all components to uniform small size
- Steam or sauté to partially cook vegetables prior to dehydrating
- Measure the food/ingredients into serving sizes before you put it in the dehydrator. (Note the original volume before dehydrating. Add water at camp to bring the food to the original volume. Or rehydrate with boiling water in a thermos prior to adding to dish.
- Spread the food/ingredients thinly & uniformly over the dehydrator trays – key for fast, thorough drying.
 - Use solid plastic tray for runny sauces, mesh tray for drier recipes or fruits/vegetable pieces.

- Foods dry faster on mesh trays. Transfer from solid tray midway.
- The optimum temperature range for dehydrating is 135/140°F (vegies, fruits) to 160°F (meats, eggs). Follow recommendation of the dehydrator manufacturer.
 - Higher temps can ‘harden’ the food on the outside before it dries the inside, and the remaining moisture can breed pathogens.
 - Check your dehydrator (empty) with a food thermometer
- Don’t scrimp on drying time (overnight or longer).
 - Food should be crisp-brittle, no moisture or stickiness to the touch, after cooling. (jerky, fruit will be hard but pliable)
- May want to re-chop sauces or stews in food processor after most of the liquid has evaporated.
 - The closer you can get sauces to a powder consistency, the richer the sauce will taste when rehydrated.
 - The smaller the pieces, the faster it will rehydrate (but you may prefer a bit more texture).
- The fully dried product should be crispy, brittle dry. Test for brittleness (or, for fruit, lack of stickiness) after fully cooling. Cool down fully before packaging.
- After the food is fully dry, let cool, then chop, process or crumble, place in a zip-loc freezer bag. Vacuum sealed bags work well also. The bags should hold the desired serving portions. Store it in a cool place until time to pack. Store in refrigerator if use within a month. Store in a freezer if for later use.
- Use sturdy freezer bags with a very secure seal.
 - Particularly useful if you plan to rehydrate and eat out of the bag at camp. Boilable bags are available.
- Label the bag with the food content, # servings and date it was packed.
- If using pasta, small/thin pasta such as angle hair, spaghetti or couscous will minimize cooking time. Or use packages of partially cooked pastas, rice, and grain blends.

Safe Storage of Dehydrated Foods

- Seal tightly to keep the food from re-absorbing moisture or contaminants during storage, which could allow bacteria growth.
 - Package in single serving bags – don’t dip out of larger bag.
- If dried to the brittle stage it is not necessary to freezer-store the food (though colder is better). Can safely store most foods for 4-6 months or longer if kept dry.
- Vacuum-sealing may add some length to storage

Preparing Your Dehydrated Meal At Camp

- Heat (treated) water to almost boiling, then rehydrate for 5-30 minutes in freezer bag, mug or pot or thermos.
- Boil the dehydrated food in a pot of water for 4-5 minutes (can use untreated water for this).
- CAMP TIP: Heat just enough water for rehydrating – does not need to boil if you've treated it (conserves fuel).
- CAMP TIP: Bring 'goodies' to spice up your dehydrated meal! (see Recipes for different spice mixes).