



# Drying Fruits at Home

HE-360

**D**rying is the oldest method of preserving fruits. It is easy and can be the least expensive method, too. Most fruits can be dried. And many can be stored for 6 months to a year. If you think you would like to try drying fruit, here's how.

## Selecting and Preparing Fruit

Select sound, ripe, firm fruit. Fruit ripened on the tree, vine, or bush will have a better flavor and color. Wash fruit thoroughly to remove dirt and insecticides. Discard all that are mushy, decayed, bruised, or molded. Some will need to be peeled or to have seeds removed; others can be dried as is (see table below).

## Pretreating

Many fruits, especially apples, peaches, and pears, tend to darken during drying and storage. Pretreating preserves color. Pretreating by the steam blanch method also decreases loss of vitamins A and C and minimizes microbial spoilage and insect infestation. Figs and berries do not need pretreating.

**Salt Solution Method.** Prepare a solution of 2 to 4 tablespoons of salt to 1 gallon of water. Soak the fruit 15 to 30 minutes; drain well.

**Ascorbic Acid/Vitamin C Method.** Ascorbic acid is the same as vitamin C. Volume for volume, it is the most effective of the pretreatment solutions. You can buy pure crystalline ascorbic acid or vitamin C tablets at grocery stores, drug stores, discount department stores, and some natural-food stores. Vitamin C tablets must be finely crushed before mixing with water. Ascorbic acid is used most often with apples, peaches, apricots, nectarines, and pears. For apples, use 1 tablespoon of pure crystalline ascorbic acid for each cup of cold water. For peaches, apricots, nectarines, and pears, use 1½ tea-

spoons for each cup of water. One cup of the solution will treat about 5 quarts of cut fruit. Sprinkle it over the fruit as it is peeled, pitted, cored, or sliced. Turn pieces over gently and sprinkle all sides to make sure each is coated thoroughly.

**Citric Acid Method.** It takes three times as much citric acid as ascorbic acid for the same amount of fruit. Mix ¼ cup of citric acid to each quart of cold water. Soak prepared fruit about 15 to 30 minutes. Drain well.

**Lemon Juice Method.** It takes six times as much lemon juice as ascorbic acid to pretreat the fruit. Mix 1 to 1½ cups of lemon juice to each quart of water. Soak prepared fruit about 15 to 30 minutes. Drain well.

**Commercial Color Preservers.** These mixtures contain crystalline ascorbic acid and sugar, or ascorbic acid, sugar, and citric. They are sold under various trade names. They are not quite as effective, volume for volume, as plain ascorbic acid, but they are readily available and easy to use. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

**Steam Blanch Method.** Water blanching gives fruit a cooked flavor, so it is not generally recommended. Steam blanching does not give a cooked flavor. To steam blanch, put 1½ to 2 inches of water in a double boiler or large pot; let water come to a boil. Place fruit loosely, not more than 1 inch deep, into the top of the double boiler or a colander or basket. Put it into the boiler, above the water, and cover with a tight-fitting lid. Follow directions in the table below.

## Drying

**Sun Methods.** Prepare fruit and have it ready to start drying by 9 a.m. Temperature needs to be 90 to 100 degrees F by noon with the humidity less than 60 percent.

### Pretreating by Steam Blanch Method

Fruit	Preparation	Blanching Time
Apples	Peel, core, and cut into rings ⅛ to ¼ inch thick, then steam.	5 minutes, depending on texture
Berries	Leave whole.	Do not need pretreating
Figs	Cut in half or prick whole figs with ice pick.	Do not need pretreating
Grapes (seedless)	Leave whole.	½ to 1 minute
Peaches	Steam whole first then peel, pit, and slice into rings ½ inch thick	8 minutes
Pears	Peel, core, and cut into rings ¼ inch thick, then steam.	2 to 6 minutes, depending on texture

## IN OPEN SUNLIGHT

1. Place pretreated fruit one layer deep on
  - a. a wooden slatted tray covered with a clean, dry cloth. (Do not use wood that has an odor.) *OR*
  - b. a tray of *aluminum* window screen covered with a clean, dry cloth. *OR*
  - c. heavy cardboard covered with aluminum foil.
2. Cover fruit with a thin cloth, being sure cloth does not touch fruit. Weight cloth so that insects cannot get under it and lay eggs on fruit.
3. Turn over fruit every 2 hours or so to speed drying.
4. Bring the trays of fruit inside at night.
5. Put the fruit out the next day to finish drying. Fruit will be leathery when dry.

**Note:** If the humidity is higher than 60 percent or if it should rain, finish drying fruit in the oven.

## IN A CAR

Park the car in direct sunlight. Close all windows, leaving a small crack for air circulation. Be sure there are no flies or other insects inside the car. The car needs to be clean on the inside. Follow the same procedure as for drying in open sunlight, but put the trays on the car seats and in the trunk. Cover trays with a clean, dry cloth. Turn over fruit every 2 hours to speed drying.

**Attic Method.** An attic is a good place for drying if there are no insects or rodents. Follow the same procedure as for drying in open sunlight.

**Electric Dehydrator Method.** Follow manufacturer's instructions. If you want to build your own, contact your county Extension office for addresses where you can get blueprints.

**Oven Method.** To dry fruits, remove oven racks. Turn on oven to 140 degrees F. Place a clean, thin cloth on each rack, leaving 1 to 1½ inches uncovered on all four sides to allow for circulation of heat. Put the fruit one layer deep on the cloth. Return racks to oven. Place a candy or deep fat frying thermometer in the oven to check temperature. Keep temperature at 140 to 150 degrees F. Leave the oven door open 2 to 4 inches to allow moisture to escape. Turn over fruit every 2 hours to speed drying. Check thermometer every hour.

You can dry fruit on cookie sheets or similar pans, but it may stick. Use nonstick coated pans.

**Microwave Oven Method.** Follow manufacturer's instructions. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has not given any instructions at this time.

## Testing for Dryness

Fruit must be dry enough to prevent microbial growth and spoilage. When testing a fruit for dryness, remove a handful and let it cool a few minutes. Fruit that is warm or hot seems softer, moister, and more pliable than it actually is.

When the fruit is cool, squeeze several pieces together. Open your hand. If the pieces separate, they are dry enough to store. If they stay in a ball, they have too much

moisture and need additional drying. Fruit should be leathery and pliable when dry enough for storage.

## Conditioning

**Sun Or Attic Dried Fruit.** Fill a clean, dry jar ¾ full with the dried fruit. Tighten the lid securely. Leave it for 3 to 4 days, vigorously shaking the jar every day. This will equalize any remaining moisture that is in the fruit.

Next, place the fruit one layer deep on a baking pan in a 160 degree F oven. Heat 10 to 15 minutes, shaking pans every few minutes; do not scorch the fruit. The heat will destroy any insect eggs that could be on the fruit and also will remove any remaining moisture. After 10 to 15 minutes, turn off the oven and leave the fruit in the closed oven until it reaches room temperature. Shake the fruit occasionally. Do not put warm or hot fruit in storage containers because moisture will develop.

**Oven or Dehydrator Dried Fruit.** For best results, let fruit stay in the closed oven or dehydrator until it reaches room temperature.

## Storing

A glass jar with a tight-fitting lid is a good container to use. If using a jar fruit has been in, wash the jar, lid, and band with hot, soapy water. Rinse and dry thoroughly.

A metal container with a tight-fitting lid is also good if the fruit is first placed in a plastic freezer bag and then in the container. Moisture- and vapor-resistant freezer containers with tight-fitting lids can also be used.

Fill each clean, dry container full, but do not pack. Make sure the lid fits tightly.

Store dried fruits in a cool, dark, dry place. Check every week for the first 6 weeks to be sure fruit is in good condition. Recommended storage time is from 6 to 12 months.

## Reconstituting

One cup of dried fruit reconstitutes to about 1½ cups. Add water to just cover the fruit; more can be added later if needed. It takes 1 to 8 hours to reconstitute most fruits. The time varies with the kind of fruit, size of pieces, and temperature of the water. Using hot water takes less time. Oversoaking will produce a loss of flavor.

To cook reconstituted fruit, cover and simmer in the soak water to retain the nutritive quality and flavor. Add sugar near the end of the cooking process so it will not interfere with the fruit's absorption of water. Adding a few grains of salt helps bring out the natural sweetness of most fruits. Fresh lemon or orange juice added just before serving will help give a fresh fruit flavor.

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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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