Drying Vegetables at Home

Drying is the oldest method of preserving vegetables. It is easy and can be the least expensive method, too. And most can be stored for 6 months to a year. If you would like to try drying vegetables, here's how.

Selecting and Preparing Vegetables

Select mature yet tender vegetables that have their characteristic color, flavor, and texture. Wilted or inferior vegetables will not make a satisfactory dried product. Overmature vegetables will be tough and fibrous or soft and mushy.

From the garden to the drying tray within 2 hours is a good rule to follow. After gathering, begin immediately preparing the vegetables for drying. Wash the vegetables thoroughly to remove dirt and insecticides. Sort and discard any that have decay, bruises, or bad spots. After thoroughly washing, prepare the vegetables as you would for a meal.

Pretreating

Enzymes in vegetables are responsible for color, flavor, and odor changes while maturing. These changes will continue in most vegetables during drying and storage unless they are pretreated by blanching.

Blanching saves some of the vitamin content, sets the color, hastens drying by relaxing the tissues, helps prevent undesirable changes in flavor during storage, and helps insure satisfactory water absorption during cooking.

Blanching can be done by steaming or immersing the vegetable in boiling water. Steaming causes the vegetable to retain more of the water-soluble nutrients, but it takes longer than immersing.

Steam Method. Add 1 ½ to 2 inches of water to a boiler with a tight-fitting lid. Heat water to boiling. Place vegetable loosely, not more than 1 inch deep, into a colander or basket. Put it into the boiler. Place the lid on the boiler and leave the vegetable until it is thoroughly heated and wilted. When steamed enough, it will appear cooked (translucent) nearly to the center (see table on blanching).

Water Immersion Method. Use only enough water to cover the vegetable. Bring the water to a vigorous boil and gradually stir in the vegetable. Put a lid on the boiler. When the water returns to a vigorous boil, start counting the time given in the table on blanching. Remove the vegetable, drain, and spread it out, one layer deep, to dry.

Drying

Sun Methods. Prepare the vegetable and have it ready to start drying by 9:00 a.m. The temperature needs to be 90 to 100 degrees F by noon, and the humidity less than 60 percent.

In open sunlight:
1. Place pretreated vegetable 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.

   Note: Do not use galvanized screen or hardware cloth to dry food on. There could be an undesirable reaction.

   2. Cover the vegetable with a thin cloth, being sure the cloth does not touch the vegetable. Weight the cloth so that insects cannot get under it and lay eggs on the vegetable.

   3. Turn the vegetable over every 2 hours or so to speed up drying.
4. Bring the tray in at night.
5. Put the vegetable out the next day to continue drying. It may take up to 3 days to dry some vegetables. They need to be slightly brittle to bone dry.

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

In the car:
Put car in direct sunlight. Raise all windows, being sure there are no flies or other insects in the car. The car needs to be clean on the inside. Follow the same procedure for drying in open sunlight but put the trays in the car and trunk. Do not cover the trays. Turn the vegetable over every 2 hours to speed drying.

Oven Method. Remove oven racks. Turn oven on to 140 degrees F. Place a clean, thin cloth on each rack, leaving 1 to ½ inches uncovered on all four sides to allow for circulation of heat. Put the vegetable pieces one layer deep on the cloth. Return racks to the oven. Place a candy or deep fat frying thermometer in the oven to check temperature. Keep the temperature at 140 to 150 degrees F. Leave the oven door open 2 to 4 inches to allow moisture to escape. Turn the vegetable every 2 hours to hasten drying. Check the thermometer every hour.

You can dry vegetables on cookie sheets, etc., but they may stick. Use non-stick coated pans.

Microwave Oven Method. Follow the manufacturer's instructions. The U.S. Department of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vegetable*</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Steam (minutes)</th>
<th>Water (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans, green</td>
<td>Cut in short pieces or cut lengthwise.</td>
<td>2 to 2½</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans, lima</td>
<td>Shell.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabbage</td>
<td>Cut in strips ¼ inch thick.</td>
<td>2½ to 3</td>
<td>1½ to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Cut in ½ inch slices or strips.</td>
<td>2 to 2½</td>
<td>3½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn, whole grain</td>
<td>Cut after steaming or water blanching.</td>
<td>until milk is set</td>
<td>until milk is set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggplant</td>
<td>Peel; slice ½ inch thick.</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okra</td>
<td>Slice ¼ inch thick.</td>
<td>(Does not need pretreating.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Slice ¼ inch thick.</td>
<td>(Do not need pretreating.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsley</td>
<td>Separate clusters.</td>
<td>(Does not need pretreating.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peas</td>
<td>Shell.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Peppers and Pimentos</td>
<td>Cut in slices ¼ inch thick or chop in pieces the size of lima beans.</td>
<td>(Do not need pretreating.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squash, summer</td>
<td>Slice ¼ inch thick.</td>
<td>2½ to 3</td>
<td>1½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes (for stewing)</td>
<td>Steam or water blanch first; then peel and slice ¼ inch thick.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agriculture has not given any instructions at this time.

**Attic Method.** This is a good place for drying if there are no insects or rodents. Follow the same procedure as for drying vegetables 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.

### Testing for Dryness

Vegetables must be dry enough to prevent microbial growth and spoilage. When testing a vegetable for dryness, remove a handful and let it cool a few minutes. Foods that are warm or hot seem more soft, moist, and pliable than they actually are. Vegetables should be hard and brittle when ready for storage.

### Conditioning

**Sun or Attic Dried.** Fill a clean, dry jar three-quarters full with the dried vegetable. Tighten the lid securely. Leave it 3 to 4 days, vigorously shaking the jar every day. This will equalize any remaining moisture that is in the vegetable. Next, place the vegetable pieces one layer deep on a baking pan in a 160 degrees F. oven. Heat 10 to 15 minutes, shaking the pan every few minutes; do not scorch the vegetable. The heat will destroy any insect eggs that could be on the vegetable and also will remove any remaining moisture. After 10 to 15 minutes, turn the oven off and leave the vegetable in the closed oven until it is at room temperature. Shake the vegetable occasionally. Do not put warm vegetables in storage containers because moisture could develop.

**Oven or Dehydrator Dried.** Let the vegetable stay in a closed oven or dehydrator until it is at room temperature. Then fill each clean, dry container full, but do not pack. Make sure the lid fits tightly.

### Storing

A glass jar with a tight-fitting lid is one of the best containers to use. If using a jar vegetables have 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 vegetable is first placed in a plastic freezer bag and then in the container. Moisture vapor-resistant freezer containers with tight-fitting lids can also be used.

Store a dried vegetable in a cool, dry, dark place. Check every week for the first 6 weeks to be sure the vegetable is in good condition. Recommended storage time is for 6 to 12 months. Carrots, onions, and cabbage should be used within 6 months.

### Reconstituting

One cup of dried vegetable reconstitutes to about 2 cups.

- Root, stem, and seed vegetables should be ½ to 2 hours in enough cold water to keep them covered. After soaking, simmer until tender, allowing excess water to evaporate.
- Cabbage and tomatoes do not need to soak. Simply add enough water to keep them covered and simmer until tender.
- Dehydrated vegetables are best when used as ingredients for soups, casseroles, sauces, stuffings, and stews.
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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.