

Home Preservation of Dates



EXTENSION FOODS AND NUTRITION SPECIALISTS
TEXAS A. & M. COLLEGE SYSTEM

Dates are a good source of energy in the form of easily digested sugar. They are eaten fresh or cured. There are three general classes of dates - soft, firm and bread dates. Most of the dates produced in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are soft dates. They have a soft texture due to high moisture content and sour easily unless dried, canned or frozen. Methods given in this leaflet are primarily for soft dates.

Gathering and Preparing Dates

Picking

Dates for curing should be fully mature before picking, as indicated by complete absence of green color, and the ripening of a few fruits. The entire bunch can be cut at this time.

Sorting

Sort the fruit carefully. Discard all fruit showing mold, skin damage or "souring."

Cleaning

Wash the dates and spread on a surface for drying. An electric fan will hasten drying.

Ripening

Pack the dates in paper bags or cartons and place in the home freezer or freezer locker plant. They will freeze solid in about 15 hours. Remove frozen dates and spread out to thaw and dry. This will require about 2 hours with the aid of an electric fan. The dates will look translucent which is characteristic of the fruit beginning to ripen. Arrange them in a warm place to go through the ripening process. This can be in an oven held at 95 degrees to 100 degrees F. for 18 to 24 hours. The time required to ripen the dates differs with the variety, the temperature and the moisture content of the fruit and the surrounding air. Remove the fruit to room temperature and allow to cool. Dates may be frozen, canned or dried if the quantity is more than can be eaten immediately.

Methods of Preserving Dates

Freezing

Pack clean, ripened dates by layers in moisture-vapor-proof containers. Store at 0 degrees F. in a home freezer or locker plant.

Canning

Place cleaned, pitted dates in hot clean jars and close. Process in a hot water bath for 20 minutes in pint jars; 25 minutes in quart jars or process in pressure canner at 10 pounds pressure for 15 minutes. Complete the seal if closures are not of self-sealing type. Cool, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

Drying

Dates may be dried in a sun-dryer, electric dryer or in the oven. Spread the cleaned and pitted dates in a layer on wire or slatted trays and proceed according to type dryer to be used.

It will take 1 to 3 days to cure the dates in the sun-dryer -- depending upon temperature and moisture in the air. About 24 to 36 hours is required in the electric dryer or oven. If the oven is used, leave the door partly open. Have a thermometer on the tray. Gradually increase the temperature to 140 degrees F. The same temperature would be used for an electric dryer. Follow the manufacturer's directions for using the electric dryer. When the dates are dry, they should be firm, not sticky.

The dried dates may be packed in hot, clean jars and sealed, or put in cellophane bags and heat sealed. Label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

Partially Drying and Vacuum Packing

Heating kills insect eggs and bacteria that may be on the fruit. It also reduces the moisture content of the fruit.

Spread the cleaned fruit on racks or trays, one layer thick. It is preferred that trays have wire bottoms or slats to allow for circulation of heat through the fruit. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees F.; then turn off heat. Place the trays in the oven and allow to cool. The time required will vary with kind of oven and variety of date. The date should be dry and firm, but not sticky. If this consistency is not reached by the first heating, put the trays back into the oven which has been preheated. This second heating usually removes extra moisture, leaving the fruit in desired condition. "Soft" varieties of dates probably will require this second treatment. Pack the dates into hot, clean jars. No syrup or liquid is added. Use self-seal lids. Place jars in the pressure cooker. Bring the pressure up to 5 pounds for 10 minutes; then release the steam suddenly to pull any remaining moisture out of the jars. Remove from cooker to cool. Label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

Date Paste

Clean and pit the dates. Put in top of double boiler. Let cook for about 30 minutes. Stir often to allow even cooking and blending of the peel and meat. The mixture will not boil because it is very thick. Pack the hot mixture into hot, clean jars. Close jars and process in a water bath for 10 minutes. Remove jars. Complete seal if closures are not of self-sealing type. Cool, label, and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

Pickled Dates

Use fresh dates. Slit lengthwise; remove the stone and place half a pecan meat in each date. Pack into clean jars and pour over the dates this syrup after it has been brought to a boil:

8 cups sugar	1 teaspoon oil of cinnamon
3 cups white wine vinegar	1/2 teaspoon oil of cloves
1 cup water	

Boil 3 minutes.

Close jars. Process dates in pressure cooker 10 minutes at 5 pounds pressure, or 30 minutes in boiling water bath. Remove jars; complete seal if closures are not of self-sealing type. Cool, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

REFERENCE

Morris, J. S. and G. H. Godfrey, *A New Method for Ripening Dates*, Texas Agr. Exp. Sta. P.R. 1139, 1948.

Jellied Date and Apricot Salad

1 package lemon gelatin	1/4 cup chopped walnuts or pecans
1 cup hot water	
2 No. 2 1/2 cans whole peeled apricots	3/4 cup chopped dates
1/3 cup peanut butter	3 tablespoons lemon juice fruit dressing

Dissolve gelatin in 1 cup hot water. Measure juice from apricots and add enough more water to make 1 cup. Strain. Add to gelatin mixture. Chill until almost thick. Drain apricots and remove pits. Combine peanut butter, chopped nuts and chopped dates with lemon juice and mix well. Fill the cavity of each apricot with a spoonful of this mixture, pressing halves together so that fruit retains its whole appearance. Put one filled apricot into each individual mold. Then fill molds with gelatin and chill until firm. Unmold on lettuce and serve with fruit dressing.

Date Filled Bars

1 cup of pitted dates or date paste	2 cups flour
1/2 cup sugar	1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 cup water	1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup chopped nuts	1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
	1/4 teaspoon cloves
	1/2 cup fat
	1 cup brown sugar (packed)
	1 egg, well beaten

Combine dates or date paste, sugar and water in a saucepan. Cook over direct heat, stirring constantly until thick. Cool. Add nuts.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and cloves. Cream fat; add brown sugar gradually; cream well. Add egg; beat well. Blend in dry ingredients gradually; mix thoroughly. Spread half of dough in well greased 12 x 8-inch pan. Spread date filling over dough in pan and cover with remaining dough. Bake in moderate oven (375° F.) 10 to 12 minutes. Cut into bars or squares.

TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

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