



HOME PRESERVATION OF DATES



The method of handling dates depends upon the variety used, therefore it is well to know the various types. There are three general classes of dates--*soft*, *firm*, and *bread* dates. Most seedlings produced in (South) Texas are soft dates. They have soft texture due to high moisture content and sour easily unless dried, canned, or frozen. Recipes given here are primarily for soft dates.

GATHERING AND PREPARING THE DATES

As the dates begin to ripen, the bunches can be covered with cheese cloth or muslin bags to prevent asps and other pests from damaging them. When 10 percent to 20 percent of the dates in a bunch have ripened, cut the bunch from the tree and hang in a cool ventilated place to finish ripening. Only part of the dates will ripen at a time, so pick them over regularly. Some varieties will shrivel when the bunches are cut and cannot be ripened off the tree. Handle the bunch so that the cap stays on. If the cap is pulled off, bacteria can enter and cause souring. Sort the fruit carefully and discard that which shows signs of fungus skin damage or souring. Dates absorb water readily. For this reason it is best to wipe them off with a damp cloth rather than dip them in water. The dates may be pitted if desired. A short-bladed knife or a pair of tweezers helps remove pits more easily. Dip the tweezers or knife in warm water occasionally to keep them from getting sticky.

Ripening With Carbon Bisulfide

Dates that have just reached the 'turning' stage -- from yellow to brown -- may be picked and put in jars to complete ripening. Put 5 to 10 drops of Hi-Life (carbon bisulfide) on a small piece of cotton and put in top of jar of fruit. Seal jar and let stand for 48 hours. Then remove dates from jar. Some of the dates will be soft ripe. These are ready to be dehydrated, canned or frozen. The dates that are not ripe should be held at a temperature ranging from 100 to 120 degrees for another 48 hours before they are preserved.

METHODS OF PRESERVING DATES

Drying

Dates may be dried in sun-dryer, electric dryer, or in the oven. After the dates are cleaned and pitted, spread 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 Fahrenheit. The same temperature would be used for electric dryer. Follow the manufacturer's directions for use of 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. Store in a cool, dry, dark place.

Partially Drying And Vacuum Pack

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 best if trays have wire bottoms or slats to allow for circulation of heat through the fruit. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees Fahrenheit, then turn off heat; then place the trays in the oven and allow it 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 secured by the first heating, put the trays back into the oven which has been preheated. This second heating usually removes the 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.

Canning

After the dates are cleaned and pitted, put into clean hot jars. Seal. Process in hot water bath for 20 minutes for pints; 25 minutes for quart jars.

If brandied dates are desired, add 4 to 5 table-spoons brandy to each pint jar before sealing.

Freezing

Clean ripened dates with damp cloth. Pack, by layers, into a moisture- and vapor-proof container. Keep cool until sharp frozen. Store at zero degrees Fahrenheit.

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 date meat. The mixture will not boil because it is so thick.

Pack the hot mixture into hot clean jars. Seal and process in a water bath for 10 minutes.

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 the following syrup after it has been brought to a boil:

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

Boil 3 minutes.

Process dates in pressure cooker 10 minutes at 5 pounds pressure, or 30 minutes in boiling water bath.

Cool, label, and store in cool place.

Preserved dates should be stored in a cool, dry, dark place until used.

By

Extension Food Specialists

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