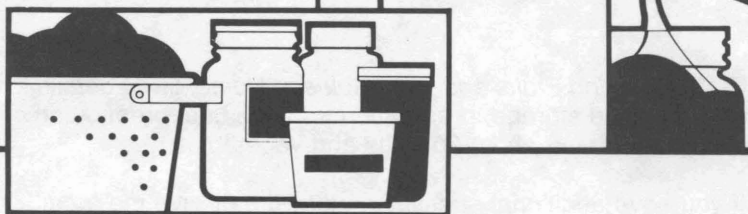


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Preserving Food at Home



Drying



Lesson 5 Drying

Dear Home Food Preserver,

Drying to preserve foods at home can be done with a minimum of equipment and energy costs. Drying takes more time than other preservation methods and the use of dried products in family meals is more limited than for other methods of food preservation. However, dried foods require less storage space than foods preserved through other methods.

If you are considering drying foods, you may want to try a few products in small amounts for your family to sample before drying on a large scale. You will find that "trial and error" is the best way to learn the basics.

In areas where solar (sun) energy can be utilized, the cost of drying can be very low. However, depending on the whims of nature is a bit risky. If your peaches are ripe, but the skies are cloudy or rain is falling, you may have to opt for another method of preservation.

A simple way to try your skills at drying is to dry small quantities in your oven. It is an excellent way to learn the basics with little investment of equipment. Drying trays can be made easily from wood, stretcher frames, old picture frames or even cooling racks covered with hardware cloth, aluminum screening or cheese cloth.

Many commercial dryers are on the market and do a satisfactory job. If you will be doing a great deal of drying, such an appliance may be a good investment. Consider family food needs carefully in evaluating your need for another household appliance. One of the main reasons consumers preserve food at home is to save money. An appliance that is used infrequently or not at all after a few uses wastes money that can be used for other needs and takes up storage space.

You may want to start with vegetables, such as onions and peppers, that do not require blanching or other pretreatment. Other vegetables must be blanched to stop enzyme action before drying. Blanching saves some vitamin content, sets the color, hastens the drying by relaxing tissues, prevents undesirable changes in flavor during storage and helps insure restoration during cooking.

Fruits generally make a better product if pretreated before drying. Sulfuring is the preferred method for fruits that tend to darken during drying and storage, especially apples, apricots, peaches, nectarines and pears. Sulfuring preserves color and flavor, decreases losses of vitamins A and C, minimizes spoilage and insect infestation. Flowers of sulfur or sublimed sulfur have a high degree of purity and are available at any store. Blanching, syrup blanching and treating with ascorbic acid are other methods of pretreating fruits before drying.

B-1214, *Drying Fruits and Vegetables at Home*, gives details for these procedures along with information on packaging and storage, preparation for table use, preparation of foods for drying, equipment and specific procedures for drying about 20 fruits and vegetables.

If you have additional questions, just write or give me a call.

Sincerely,

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

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