

Fun With Food
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Some people save a lot of email messages, magazine articles, and newspaper articles with recipes for meals and preserved foods. Every once in a while one might be so interesting it must be tried. Hopefully, this recap of an experiment with Polka Dot Fruit Leather (aka fruit rollup) will be such a recipe. (It was inspired by an online blog entry.)

The ingredients could not be easier: 1 ½ cups unsweetened applesauce and a small amount of one or more fresh sauces dried in a dehydrator. That's it.

Make and use homemade applesauce or use store-bought unsweetened applesauce. If using store-bought applesauce, make sure it's unsweetened. The amount of sugar added to commercial applesauce interferes with proper drying, making it sticky and not leathery. (But the fruit leather will still taste good.)

Choose a fruit to complement the applesauce. A handful of blackberries makes a nice colorful contrast to the applesauce.

Make a quick fruit sauce by rinsing and draining the fruit, and put it in a non-aluminum pan. Mash the fruit and heat it on low for about 10-15 minutes until the sauce thickens. Turn off the heat and let it cool.

Lightly grease a dehydrator tray liner. (Use a very light touch when spraying or the result will be one greasy side of the fruit leather.) Pour the applesauce onto the tray and spread it to about ¼ inch thickness. The 1 ½ cups of applesauce fills a standard round or rectangular dehydrator tray.

Put the cooled fruit sauce in a squeeze bottle, frosting decorator bag, or just a regular baggie with one corner cut off. Then put dots of fruit sauce in a general circle pattern around the applesauce. Or be creative and write names or love notes, or draw pictures.

Put the loaded tray in the dehydrator and turn the setting to 135°F. The amount of time needed to dry varies depending on the thickness. Start checking the fruit leather after 4 hours. It takes between 6-9 hours to dry.

How to know when it is done? Finished applesauce-based leather is evenly translucent without any moist spots, but still pliable and leathery, not crisp. Cut it into strips, roll onto wax paper, and store in an airtight container.

A couple of tips about making fruit leather:

- Consistent thickness is more important than covering every section of the tray. If the mixture spreads too thinly, it will crack.
- To create a consistent thickness, use an offset spatula. To check that there is a consistent thickness, stick a toothpick into the mixture and measure the moisture

- level on the toothpick. Check other areas on the sheet with separate toothpicks and compare the moisture line.
- Do not spread the applesauce (or any pureed mixture) too thinly. Yes, it will dry faster, but it will be hard to lift from the tray and will probably tear into shreds. (The shreds are still good to eat, but a lot more work to get at!)
 - To speed up the drying process, flip the fruit leather after about 4 hours when the top is firm and the edges lift easily. Flip the tray onto another tray, carefully peel the leather off, and place it onto the second tray.

To learn more about the many exciting things prepared using a dehydrator, come to the MFP Dehydrating and Freezing class at the Marshall Grange in Garden Valley, on August 21 from 10-Noon.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive the new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.

If any assistance or special accommodations are required for any of the MFP educational programs, please call 530-621-5502 to make arrangements.