

August 12, 2015



Dehydrating Food
By Kathy Milligan
UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

The UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers are having a FREE class on Dehydration and Freezing August 18th 2015 from 10 AM to 12 PM, at the El Dorado County Fairgrounds Board Room, 100 Placerville Drive, Placerville. If you attend the class you are in for a real treat.

So many people are curious about drying food but say they don't have a dehydrator. There are four ways to dehydrate: solar, sun, oven and dehydrator. In this class you will learn the safe way to dehydrate just about any food.

Drying food is one of the oldest methods of food preserving that we know. Nearly all people were dehydrating or drying food at some point in civilization. When Columbus discovered the new world, dehydrated foods were important to sustain his crew. Native Americans, long before freezing or canning, preserved their food by sun drying. The first pioneers relied heavily on dried foods when traveling westward.

The first dehydrator that is recorded was in France about 1795. This allowed the food to dry at a controlled heat temperature of approximately 130° F with air continuously circulating. However, the design was rough compared to today's dehydrators. It was many years later before dehydrators entered into the United States.

Dehydrated foods surged during World War I, the depression, and World War II. Food was rationed and canning supplies were hard to come by. Every bit of food became important and drying food became the preferred preserving process. Drying food is still a practical preservation method today.

What is dehydrating anyway? Two basic things have to happen.

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- Heat – enough to draw out moisture, and
- Air circulation – to carry off and evaporate it.

To dehydrate most effectively, the air needs be able to absorb the released moisture to preserve the food from spoiling. Low humidity environments work best. So try not to dehydrate food when it rains.

Removing the moisture inactivates enzymes in food so that bacterial or microorganisms are inhibited from growing.

Some of the most common dehydrated foods are fruits, vegetables, dry mixes, herbs, fruit leathers, and let's not forget one of the "hunter's almighty favorites" jerky!

There are lots of fun things to do with dehydrating: all kinds of things for the kitchen, cooking and make fun gifts.

One of my favorite and easy things to do is to make citrus flavored salts. Endless possibilities...Just zest your orange, lemon or lime and have some sea salt on hand. Take the zest and mix it into the sea salt and dehydrate it until all the moisture is gone. Your kitchen will smell divine and you'll have a beautiful tasty seasoning.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preserver website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our international E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>. Find us on Facebook too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!