



Drying and Salting

DRYING

Drying is a very old method of preserving food and is useful when there is a glut of fruit or vegetables which cannot be dealt with by ordinary bottling methods. It is particularly useful for vegetables as these cannot be bottled safely without the use of a pressure cooker. Drying should only be used for vegetables which will not keep if stored fresh as the food value of fresh vegetables is greater than that of dried.

FOODS SUITABLE FOR DRYING

Fruits : Apples, dessert pears, plums and grapes.

Vegetables : Peas, beans, onions and mushrooms.

Herbs : Any.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Equipment necessary for drying is simple and inexpensive. Drying may be carried out in the oven, in a warming cupboard, on the warming rack over the stove. The essential thing is to have a constant gentle heat, the temperature, say, of a good airing cupboard and a current of air to carry off moisture as the food dries. If the oven or a

cupboard be used leave the door ajar to ensure the necessary draught. If drying in the oven, use the heat left after baking. It may need to be continued on several successive days.

Some sort of tray is needed on which to spread the food for drying. It should fit the oven or cupboard and must allow air to circulate round the food. Any one of the following would be suitable :-

- (1) Oven racks (not solid trays) with muslin stretched over them.
- (2) Wire cake trays spread with muslin.
- (3) Strips of wood nailed into a square or rectangle to fit the oven or hot cupboard, with muslin stretched across and firmly fixed.
- (4) For apple rings, a piece of clean twine or wooden rods on which to thread the rings.

Muslin, if new, should be scalded before use otherwise it may scorch during the drying.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR DRYING

The ideal temperature is 120°-150°F, but it should not exceed 150 F. This is much lower than any temperature used for cooking and is about the temperature of a good airing cupboard. Greater heat cooks the food instead of drying it and may even produce scorching. Slow heating prevents the outside hardening before the middle begins to dry.

Apples should be ripe but still fresh. Bruised apples may be used provided all damaged parts are first cut away. Peel and core the apples and cut into slices or rings $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Place at once into water containing $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. salt to 1 quart water and leave for 5-10 minutes with a plate on top to keep them under the water. This helps to retain the colour. Drain well and place on trays being sure the fruit is only one layer thick. Apple rings may be threaded on a piece of twine or a stick, but they should not touch one another during the drying process. Dry until the consistency of chamois leather.

Pears Dessert pears are the only ones which give really good results and they should be fully ripe before drying. Peel, core and cut in slices $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick. Then treat in the same way as apples.

Plums should be ripe and fresh. It is better to dry plums whole but if they are very large they may be halved and the stones removed. They should be dried with the cut side uppermost to prevent loss of juice. Spread on trays in a single layer. Dry until no moisture comes out when they are squeezed. They should not be brittle, but the consistency of prunes. Dry slowly. Several days may be required.

Grapes should be fully ripe and fresh. They should be dried whole, spread on trays in a single layer. When dry no moisture comes out when they are squeezed and the consistency should be that of a muscatel or raisin.

Peas should be well developed but still young and tender. Blanch by plunging into boiling water for about 5 minutes, then plunge into cold water and finally drain well. Spread on trays in a thin layer and turn occasionally during drying. An alternative method is to cook the peas in a little boiling salted water until they are tender but still firm. Drain well and dry as before. In both cases the peas should be dried until crisp and brittle.

Beans Young French or runner beans should be sliced in the usual way and then blanched for 5 minutes in the same way as peas. Dry until they are brittle. Broad beans should be blanched for 5 minutes and then skinned before drying in the same way as peas.

Onions which will not keep by ordinary methods of storing may be peeled, cut into rings and dried. They may be blanched for 1 minute or dried without blanching. They should be dried until crisp.

Mushrooms should be very fresh. They should be peeled and the stems removed but do not need blanching. Spread in a single layer and dry until very tough.

Herbs With the exception of parsley, herbs require no artificial heat for drying. Gather the herbs just before the plants flower, rinse in cold water and shake thoroughly. Tie the bunches loosely, so that air can reach the centre leaves; if liked the bunches may be covered with muslin to keep them clean while drying. Dry until the leaves are crisp and quite dry. Finish by rubbing to separate the leaves from the stems. For powdered herbs, crush the leaves with a rolling pin or rub through a wire sieve. Bay leaves are left whole. Parsley keeps its colour better if placed in a fairly hot oven for 1 minute, then dried slowly until it is crisp.

STORING DRIED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Dried fruits and vegetables should be left to cool at least 12 hours before being packed in airtight jars, tins or boxes. Store in a dry place,

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preferably in the dark. If mould forms during storage, this means either that the fruit or vegetable has not been dried sufficiently or has not been stored in a dry place. Herbs should be stored in a dark place in airtight tins or bottles, as they lose their flavour if left in the air or just in paper bags.

USING DRIED FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Fruit should be soaked for 24 hours and cooked in the soaking water. Sugar should be added just before cooking is finished.

Peas and beans should be soaked for 12 hours and cooked in the soaking water. Some kinds are harder than others and may need the addition of a little bicarbonate of soda to the soaking water, 1 level teaspoon of soda to 1 lb. of peas or beans. Bring to the boil slowly and cook gently until tender, 1 to 2 hours, depending on the kind.

Onions should be covered with boiling water and left to soak 1 to 2 hours before using. They may be used in stews and savoury dishes in place of fresh onions.

Mushrooms are best if added to soups and stews. They do not need soaking before use.

SALTING

String beans can be successfully salted, but the method is not suitable for other vegetables. For every 3 or 4 lb. beans, use 1 lb. salt.

The beans should be young and fresh. They should be washed, dried and sliced in the usual way. Small beans may be used whole.

Large stoneware or glass containers should be used if possible, placing a good layer of salt at the bottom, then alternate layers of beans and salt, pressing down *well* and finishing with a layer of salt.

After a few days, when the beans have shrunk, fill the jar with more beans and salt, and cover with a cork painted over with melted paraffin wax or with a bladder or synthetic skin tied very securely. The salt draws moisture from the beans and forms a brine.

Failures with this method are often due to the use of too little salt, which may cause the beans to become slimy.

To use the beans, take them from the salt, wash thoroughly in several waters, then soak for 2 hours in warm water. Soaking for too long causes toughness. Cook in boiling water without salt until they are tender (25-35 minutes).