

Fruit of the Month

DRIED FRUIT!



Drying is the oldest method of preserving food. The first European settlers in America often ate dried corn, apple, currants, grapes and meat. Sun drying of food was an easy way to prolong the life of food, but this form of dried food was different from what is available today. In different climates, the food dried differently because complete sun drying is dependent on very particular weather conditions. Drying eliminates moisture from the food resulting in a longer food life. Organisms that make food spoil require moisture to survive, so foods that have been completely dried have the longest life.

The methods of drying food, particularly fruits and vegetables, have become more sophisticated over time. The three most common methods used today are briefly described below:

- Solar: Solar dehydration of food requires 3 to 5 consecutive days of 95 degrees or above and low humidity. This climate is found only in limited areas in the United States.
- Oven: Foods are dried using a household kitchen oven. This method can be expensive as many hours are normally required to dry food. Oven dried foods are often times darker and more brittle than foods dried by other methods. This method is often suggested for first time dryers, as very little new equipment is required for this method.
- Dehydrator: This type of drying produces the highest quality product. An electric dehydrator may be purchased and various sizes and levels of quality are generally available.

Dried fruits and vegetables are high in fiber and carbohydrates and low in fat. However, dried foods are more calorically dense than their fresh counterparts. The recommended serving size for dried fruits and vegetables is half that of fresh.



Vitamin C is one nutrient that is destroyed by heat. Pretreating food with citrus juice can help increase the vitamin C content of the dried food.

Selection

For drying at home, select ripe fruits and vegetables for drying. Bruised fruit may be used if those areas are removed before drying. Do not use any food with mold on it for drying. Peel and slice food into 1/8 to 1/2 inch slices. The higher the water content, the larger the slice should be because the more it will shrink in drying.

Pretreating food before drying is a common practice, but not required. Dipping fruits into citrus juices (orange, lemon, or pineapple) helps avoid color changes. Vegetables are best dipped in diluted lemon juice before drying (1/4 cup lemon juice to 2 cups water).

Blanching is also recommended for certain vegetables (asparagus, green beans, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and peas). Blanch vegetables in boiling water for 1 to 3 minutes, or until the skin cracks.

If you choose to purchase dried fruit at the supermarket, you will generally find a good selection of the most popular fruits. A larger selection of items, especially dried vegetables, are often found at natural food stores. Most dried fruit is sold pre-packaged and may be found in either the fresh produce or canned food departments.

Dried fruits and vegetables are also sometimes available in the bulk foods section. Do not purchase any dried food with mold or an abnormal smell.

Storage

Whether dried at home or purchased, dried fruits and vegetables should be kept in an airtight container. Refrigeration is not necessary, but some people prefer the taste of cold dried food. Dried fruit may be frozen, but this sometimes affects the texture and taste of the food.

Shelf life varies from product to product, but most items will keep, if stored properly, for a minimum of one month. Some items, such as raisins, have a significantly longer shelf life of approximately a year or more.

Preparation

Generally, once a fruit or vegetable is dried, there is no additional preparation before using. Many recipes require the fruit or vegetable be sliced or diced, which is often easier when the item has been refrigerated overnight. Dried fruit and vegetables are commonly used in bread, desserts, granola, or as a topping.

Favorites

These are the most practical and common items to dry:

- Fruit: Ripe apples, berries, cherries, peaches, apricots and pears
- Vegetables: Peas, corn, peppers, tomatoes, onions, potatoes and green beans



Make Dried Fruit Part of Your 5 A Day Plan

- Add dried cranberries to a rice dish to add flavor and color.
- Sprinkle raisins and dried berries into your morning cereal.
- Sun dried tomatoes add texture and flavor to pasta and rice dishes.
- Dried apricots work great in muffins and breads.
- Dried cherries add color and nutrients to granola or trail mix.

Recipes

Blueberry Cranberry Muffins

Makes 12 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

3½ cups flour

½ cup sugar

4 tsp baking powder

½ tsp salt

1½ cups milk

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1/3 cup fat free sour cream

2 eggs, beaten

4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries, unthawed if frozen

4 Tbsp sugar

8 oz dried cranberries

Line 24 muffin cups with paper liners and set aside. Preheat oven to 400° F. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, ½ cup sugar, baking powder and salt and stir to mix. Combine milk, oil and eggs in a medium bowl and beat with a wire whisk until blended. Make a well in dry ingredients and pour the liquid ingredients into the well all at once. Stir until just moistened. In a medium bowl, combine 4 Tbsp. sugar and blueberries and toss to coat with sugar. Stir gently into batter just until blueberries are distributed. Spoon batter into muffin cups, filling $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Bake at 400° F for 20-25 minutes, until light golden brown and firm to the touch. Let cool on wire rack 3-4 minutes, then remove muffins from pan and cool completely on wire rack. Store tightly covered at room temperature. 24 muffins.

Nutritional Analysis: Fat 7g, Calories From Fat 18%, Protein 6g, Carbohydrates 63g, Fiber 3g, Cholesterol 34mg, Sodium 113mg.

Wild Rice with Sun Dried Tomatoes

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

4 oz wild rice

2 Tbsp pine nuts

1 cup sun dried tomatoes (not packed in oil)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced black olives

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced parsley



Cook the rice in an abundant amount of boiling salted water in a large pot for 35 to 45 minutes or until the grains have almost doubled in size and are tender, but still chewy. Toast the pine nuts lightly (dry skillet) until tan and add to rice. Toss gently to mix.

Nutritional Analysis: Calories 170, Fat 4g, Calories From Fat 20%, Protein 7g, Carbohydrates 30g, Fiber 3g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 358mg.

Sea Bass with Dried Fruit Salsa

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

- 4 (5 to 6 ounce) sea bass fillets, about 1-inch thick)
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cayenne pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of each dried fruit, mango, papaya, cherry, and pineapple
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup apple juice or cider
- 2 Tbsp cider vinegar
- 2 Tbsp apricot jam
- 2 Tbsp chopped cilantro

Rub fish with olive oil. Combine coriander, cumin, cinnamon and cayenne pepper; mix well. Set aside $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of the mixture for the fruit salsa. Add salt to remaining mixture. Rub seasonings over both sides of fish. Heat a large nonstick skillet over high heat until hot. Add fish. Reduce heat to medium, cook 3-5 minutes or until fish is browned and seared. Turn fish over; cook about 5 minutes or until fish is slightly firm and flaky. Combine dried fruit, juice, vinegar and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon reserved seasoning mixture in a small saucepan or microwave-safe dish. Bring to a boil. Stir in jam. Let stand 5 minutes. Transfer fish to serving plates. Top with fruit salsa and sprinkle with cilantro.

Nutritional Analysis: Calories 337, Fat 6g, Calories from Fat 16%, Protein 28g, Carbohydrates 43g, Fiber 3g, Cholesterol 58mg, Sodium 241mg.

Spiced Oranges with Raisins Sauce

Makes 4 servings

Each serving equals one 5 A Day serving

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup raisins (golden, if available)

2 Tbsp lemon juice

1 Tbsp ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground allspice

1 Tbsp minced crystallized ginger

3 large oranges

Combine sugar and water in a small saucepan and bring to a boil. Add raisins, lemon juice, cinnamon, allspice and ginger. Simmer over medium heat about 10 minutes until syrup is thickened. Transfer to a bowl and refrigerate 10 minutes. Cut peel and pith from oranges. Slice in $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch rounds. Cut rounds into quarters. Place in medium bowl. Pour cooled raisins and syrup over oranges and stir gently. Chill 2 hours or overnight.

Serve in parfait glasses, over your favorite dessert, such as angel food cake or low-fat yogurt.

Nutritional Analysis: Calories 269, Fat 0.30g, Calories from Fat 1%, Protein 2g, Carbohydrates 70g, Fiber 5g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 8mg.