

Mobile Food Dehydrator

Using your car to preserve fruit and vegetables

Drying food is one of the oldest methods of saving surplus food for future use. It is also an excellent way to intensify flavours.

What you need:

One car with a rear parcel shelf with good exposure to the sun's rays.

(For safety reasons, front windscreen shelves are not recommended!)

An old towel or cheesecloth, calico or similar.



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A drying rack Long, narrow and able to fit easily on to the parcel shelf and that has a mesh or bars that are slightly raised. The mesh allows air to circulate. Fly-screens, old fridge shelves or any other sort of rack that is or can be covered with mesh. Some fridge shelves fit inside mesh washing bags for delicate items. Thoroughly clean mesh & rack before using. The bottom line is: whatever works and is easiest! I scrub mine with bleach.

Fruit or vegetables

Food should be in slices of even thickness (up to 1 cm thick). Options include

- Mini roma tomatoes (halved, lightly sprinkled with sea salt & herbs)
- Slices of apple or pear (cored, peeled, blanched in boiling water or dipped in lemon juice. Use sweet apples)
- Apricots (de-stoned, halved or partly halved & turned inside out)
- Red Capsicum (Long, wide slices)
- Chillies (whole or halved, deseeded)
- Peaches (peeled and sliced)
- Nectarines (as for apricots. Can peel if preferred)
- Anything else you are prepared to have fun with

The web is a great resource for more ideas and pre-treatments for fruit (blanching, lemon juice, ascorbic acid etc).

Putting it all together:

You need 2-3 days of sunny, warm or hot weather. Start in the morning if possible.

Towel on parcel shelf; rack on towel; food on rack.

Place food cut side up well spaced and not touching (at least for the first few hours). Once they are well into the drying process, it's ok if they shuffle together while you're driving. Just take the corners sedately. Ditto braking.

Park car so the shelf is in the sun. Leave a window open a crack if possible.

Drying times vary according to sunniness and heat. One full hot day for semi-sun-dried tomatoes, or 2-3 warm days. More for fully sundried, which should have the consistency of a raisin or sultana. Check once or twice a day. Turn food over partway through process.

Fully dried food can be stored in the pantry in ziplock bags with air excluded. Check bag during the first few days for condensation in the bag which can turn food mouldy fast. Semi sundried food can be stored in olive oil seasoned with garlic and herbs (veggies) or fruit juice syrup (fruit) in the fridge for 2-4 weeks or for longer if in glass storage jars treated in a vacuola kit. Sundried or semi-sundried food lasts for 9-12 months stored in the freezer. Our tomatoes get eaten so fast we keep just keep them in a container in the fridge.

Have fun, Lesley 0431 050 831