

Dehydrating Foods

If you don't own a dehydrator, don't worry. You can still dry (or dehydrate) vegetables in your oven. Dehydrated vegetables are useful for soups, stews, dips, purees, and sauces. They have the advantage of being compact, lightweight, and keep indefinitely at room temperature. They are a useful pantry (or camping) staple. While it seems obvious, make sure to store dehydrated vegetables in a sealed container in a dark, cool cabinet.

When you are ready to use dehydrated vegetables, you have a few options. You can eat them as is, like kale chips or butternut squash chips. Adding dehydrated vegetables to soups, stews, and slow cookers will naturally rehydrate them, so they will be adding to the dish without extra steps. Finally, some dried vegetables are best when they are rehydrated first, and then used in cooking. Dried mushrooms are best when rehydrated in hot water and then used in the food you are preparing.

Dried tomatoes don't have to be "sundried" to be delicious. In many places, the summers are too humid to dry foods in the sun since they will just mold. Instead, opt for drying them in either a dehydrator or the oven. The result is just as intensely flavorful and colorful as the ones that were dried in less humid climates in the sun (and a whole lot less expensive).

Drying turnips preserves the light color, flavor, and nutrients of the vegetable. Dried turnips are terrific in soups (including homemade [soup stocks](#)) and stews. They also take up very little space and weigh almost nothing, which makes them very easy to store.

These savory, crunchy kale chips are a healthy alternative to potato chips. They are so tasty, don't be surprised if your batch disappears as soon as you make it. Flavor them with salt, nutritional yeast, or any other spice topping for an extra tasty treat.

Baked butternut squash chips are a crunchy, delicious snack that is both savory and naturally sweet. They don't take long to make in your oven and are much healthier than conventional chips. Skip the expense and grease of deep-fried versions.

Celery is essential to soup stocks and to the *mirepoix* blend of celery, carrot, and onion that is the backbone of so many savory dishes. When you only need a stalk or two and don't have any fresh celery on hand, dried celery will usually work fine.

Mushrooms aren't technically vegetables, but they go together in so many savory dishes. Mushrooms dry beautifully using the oven method. When rehydrated in hot water, their texture is almost identical to fresh mushrooms.

This is a great way to preserve an abundance of foraged mushrooms or simply to make sure that the store-bought mushrooms in your refrigerator don't spoil before you get around to eating them.

Dehydrating foods makes them lighter and easier to store. They will take up less space and be less likely to spoil than fresh foods. Foods can be dehydrated with the intention of rehydrating them later or with the intention of eating them in dried form. A wide variety of foods is suited for this type of treatment, including fruits, vegetables, meats and even main dishes that you cook at home.

Fruits

When dehydrating fruits, you want to soak them first in a solution that will limit bacteria and keep the fruit from becoming too dark. You can use a citric acid solution or a mix of half lemon juice and half water. Commonly dried fruits include apples, grapes, plums, pineapple, pears, figs, apricots, berries, bananas, cherries and peaches, although you can dry other fruits, like melons, as well. You can also spread pureed fruits on trays and dehydrate the puree into fruit leather. Dried fruits can be added to salads, trail mix, granola or main dishes or reconstituted and used in fruit desserts like cobblers and crisps. Once dehydrated, fruits will be leathery in texture but still pliable.

Vegetables

Most vegetables, with the exception of onions, mushrooms and tomatoes, should be blanched briefly before being dehydrated to limit discoloration and the risk of food-borne illnesses. You can dehydrate tomatoes, carrots, beets, greens, beans, squash, onions, peas, celery, corn, pumpkin and broccoli with good results. When they are finished, they will be brittle and hard. You can eat the dried vegetables like veggie chips or use them in main dishes like soups and stews.

Yummy Foods to Dehydrate

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Other Foods

You can dehydrate meat to form jerky, but it is best to use lean meat that is precooked to limit the risk of food-borne illnesses. Some people also make snacks by dehydrating bagels or teaspoonfuls of yogurt. Backpackers will save space by dehydrating stews or other precooked meals, then rehydrating them while on the trail. Just cut everything into very small pieces before cooking so the meal dehydrates more quickly and evenly.

Considerations

While dehydrated food can be delicious, you will lose some of the nutrients in these foods compared to fresh food. In particular, the B vitamins and vitamin C are sensitive to loss during the pretreatment and dehydrating, as they are water-soluble and sensitive to heat. Condition dehydrated fruits and vegetables by keeping the batches in a large container for a few days and mixing them up regularly to spread any moisture out evenly, and store all dehydrated foods in a tightly closed container in a place that is cool, dry and dark.

How to Dehydrate Bananas

Dehydrating bananas is a surprisingly easy and versatile process. Sticky or crispy, healthy or greasy, chips, wedges, or fruit leather — you can make all kinds of snacks using just about any heat source available. It might not be possible to get tired of this flavor, but just in case there are instructions for adding sweet or savory spices as well.

Bananas (ideally just ripe, with a few brown speckles but no large spots or bruises)

Lemon juice or another acidic juice (optional)

Salt, nutmeg, or cinnamon for taste (optional)

Preheat your oven to the lowest temperature setting. This is usually between 125°—200°F (50°—90°C).

- A higher temperature risks scorching the outside and not drying the inside.

Peel and slice the bananas. To make chips, slice the bananas into 1/4 inch (0.6 cm) rounds. To make wedges, cut the banana lengthwise, then lengthwise again, and slice into desired length.

- NOTE: Wedges can take up to 12 hours to dry! Start preparing them in the morning so you don't risk starting a fire overnight. Chips dry much more quickly.
- For extra crispy chips, slice the bananas into 1/8 inch rounds instead (0.3 cm). This may be easier with a mandolin.
- If the bananas are mushy and difficult to slice, chill them in the fridge for 5-10 minutes to firm them up.
- You don't even need a knife to make wedges! Work your finger into the end of the peeled banana and it should divide into three segments. It doesn't matter if the banana breaks in the process. You'll want it in smaller lengths anyway.
- For a large quantity of bananas, soaking them in lemon juice for several minutes before slicing will save you preparation time, but the additional moisture will add time to the baking stage.

Dip the pieces in lemon juice. This will add flavor and vitamins, but the main purpose is to prevent the bananas from turning brown.

- If you don't mind brown chips, you can skip this step.
- Brushing the juice onto both sides of the bananas will also work.
- Pineapple juice, lime juice, or any other acidic juice will work instead. You can even use vitamin C tablets crushed in water.
- If you don't like the flavor of the juice, dilute it in a 1:4 ratio with water and soak the bananas for 3-5 minutes.

Place the bananas on a wire rack. This raised wire platform exposes every side of the banana to the air and allows excess moisture to drip through. Also ready a cookie sheet or baking pan to place beneath it.

- The bananas should be in a single layer, not stacked atop each other. It's fine if their edges are touching.
- If you don't have a wire rack, cover a cookie sheet with parchment paper or spray it with a nonstick cooking spray. This method will be less effective at removing moisture, and could take

many hours longer (especially for wedges). You can mitigate this by leaving the oven door a few inches ajar to allow moisture to escape.

- An electric fan kept next to the open oven door will also help air circulate

Add additional flavor if desired. A sprinkling of sea salt or kosher salt adds a great savory flavor, perfect for eating on their own.

Place the bananas in the preheated oven. Use the center rack of the oven and be careful not to drop any slices onto the oven floor.

- If using a wire rack, place the baking sheet in the oven first to catch drips, then place the rack on top of the baking sheet.

Let them bake according to shape and desired crispiness. For chips, this will take 1 to 3 hours. Wedges will take 6 to 12 hours. The longer you bake them, the crispier they will be.

- Flip the bananas over once about halfway through the baking process. This will dry each side evenly and is especially important if the bananas are placed directly on a baking sheet.
- The bananas will become crispier as they cool, so remove them when they're still a little softer than you would like.

Cool the bananas completely on a wire rack. They won't be completely dry or crunchy until they're cooled to room temperature.

- If you don't have a wire rack, a dish-drying rack can work instead. An ordinary plate will still do in a pinch.

Store the bananas in an airtight container. If completely dried, they should stay good for months.

Fruit Leather in a Dehydrator

Peel the bananas. You can keep them whole or slice them in half lengthwise.

Place the whole bananas between two sheets of parchment paper. The bananas should be at least 3 inches apart from one another.

Use a heavy cutting board to smash the bananas. Try to apply even pressure to keep the banana mash an even consistency.

- You can also use a rolling pin for this.

- The goal is to get the bananas down to about 1/8 of an inch (0.3 cm). If you don't want to measure them, just make it as flat as you can!

Transfer the parchment paper to the dehydrator rack. Peel off the top sheet before you begin dehydrating. **Set your dehydrator to 135°F (57°C) for 7 hours.**

Check in at the 4 and 6 hour mark to see how they're doing.

- When ready, the top should be leathery but not sticky.
- If the bottom is still moist, you can optionally flip them over halfway through.

Let cool and slice into strips. These can be rolled up and stored in an airtight container for several months.

Peel and slice the bananas. Aim for 1/4 inch rounds (0.6 cm) or slightly smaller. Larger slices won't cook as well, while smaller ones burn more easily.

Sun-Drying Chips

Check your area's weather forecast. To successfully sun dry fruit, you'll need at least 2 days of hot, dry weather and a clear sky (at least 90° F/32°C with low humidity). Ideally you should allow for a full 7 days of drying, especially if the temperature is below 100°F/38°C.

Make or purchase an outdoor drying screen. All you need is a rectangular wooden frame with a food-safe mesh stretched across it.

- Stainless steel or plastic are the best options for meshes. Do NOT use aluminum, hardware cloth, or fiberglass meshes (unless the fiberglass mesh is clearly labeled food-grade).

Prepare the bananas. Since you're using a much lower temperature than other methods, you may wish to slice them extra thin.

- Peel the bananas and slice them into 1/8 inch rounds (0.3 cm), or at least no larger than 1/4 inch (0.6 cm).
- If you want to prevent browning, dip the pieces in lemon juice.

Add additional flavor if desired. Powdered cinnamon adds a strong flavor for sweet snacking.

Place the chips on the mesh of the drying frame. Keep them in a single layer with no overlaps. It's fine if their edges touch; they should shrink a little as they dry.

Cover the chips with an insect-proof netting or cheesecloth. This will help keep dust off your food as well.

Place the drying frame in direct sunlight away from sources of car exhaust and out of reach of animals. Elevate it at least a few inches off the ground (for instance by placing it atop stacked cinder blocks).

- Your roof is a great high-sun option that keeps it removed from most environmental pollution.
- A concrete driveway will reflect the heat from the ground, drying the bananas faster.

Bring the drying frame indoors at night. Even if the nights are still relatively warm, dew will add additional moisture to the bananas. Put it outside again during the day.

Flip the bananas over once about halfway through the drying process. The timing doesn't need to be precise; anytime on the second day of drying is fine.

Continue to dry for up to 7 days. Check daily to see if they're ready to eat.

- If you're not sure, just cut one open or bite into it to check for moisture.
- **Store the bananas in an airtight container.** If completely dried, they should stay good for months.