What is a Food Dehydrator?

A food dehydrator is a [small kitchen appliance](http://www.compactappliance.com/small-kitchen-appliances/) that is used to dry, or dehydrate, your food. Utilizing a built-in fan and low amounts of heat, this small appliance uses a light flow of hot air to reduce the overall amount of water found in fruits, veggies, meats and other foods. Once the water is removed, the food won’t spoil as quickly as it normally would, and is also impervious to many kinds of bacteria that would otherwise grow.

Additionally, food that has been properly dehydrated will continue to retain the vast majority of its original nutritional value. Once you cook your food, you start to lose the overall nutrition potential, which is why many people tout a raw food diet as being one of the healthiest for you. A food dehydrator allows you to retain all of those nutrients and vitamins within your food, but makes it more convenient for you to store and carry around with you.

6 Simple Food Dehydrating Tips

Here are six basic food dehydrating tips that you should keep in mind.

1. **Make sure you have the right temperature**
The temperature and time required to adequately dehydrate will vary depending on the type of dehydrator you buy, as well as the food you want to dehydrate. General time and temperature guidelines will be printed on the dehydrator label or included in the instruction manual along with suggested times needed.
2. **Make sure foods are 95% dehydrated**
In order to be stored properly, foods need to be at least 95 percent dehydrated. If your items feel soft, spongy or sticky, put them back in the dehydrator for additional time. Hard and crunchy or breakable pieces are done. High indoor humidity, air conditioning or breezes may alter the time needed to dehydrate foods. Ideally, find a dry, warm place away from air vents and windows to set up your dehydrator.
3. **Don’t try to dry foods quicker**
Do not worry about over-drying your foods. You can dry them longer if necessary, but it’s not wise to turn the temperature settings up in an attempt to dry the foods quicker. This will seal the outside, leaving moisture within, which will ultimately lead to the food spoiling before you have a chance to eat it.
4. **Preparation is key**
Before you add dehydrate anything, make sure you thoroughly wash all foods with an anti-bacterial vegetable cleaner. Wear gloves when preparing foods to avoid getting skin oils on the food. Steam all low-acid vegetables for 10 minutes prior to dehydrating. After they have been steamed, pat them dry before placing them in the food dehydrator. Spritz bananas and apples with lemon juice to avoid browning.
5. **Become more efficient**
Just like you’re using an oven, it is wise to turn on the dehydrator prior to use to allow it to warm up to the required temperature before adding food. Prepare items that require the same temperature, and dehydrate at the same time. For best results, slice all items to equal thickness and size.

Choosing the Best Food Dehydrator for You

Top 3 Food Dehydrators:


[Excalibur 9 Tray Food Dehydrator with Timer](http://www.compactappliance.com/excalibur-9-tray-food-dehydrator-timer-black/3926TB.html)


[Nesco Gardenmaster Food Dehydrator & Jerky Maker](http://www.compactappliance.com/Nesco-Gardenmaster-Food-Dehydrator-FD-1010P-FD-1018P/FD-101XP.html)


[Nesco American Harvest Square 4-Tray Food Dehydrator](http://www.compactappliance.com/Nesco-American-Harvest-Square-4-Tray-Food-Dehydrator-FD-80/FD-80.html)

The most important feature of a food dehydrator is the fan. When you’re shopping for a food dehydrator, it’s recommended that you get one with a fan in the back, instead of on the top or the bottom of the unit.

A back-mounted fan allows your food to dry evenly throughout the entire dehydrator. Top and bottom fans tend to dry first at the closet levels, and the fan blows scents from foods on one level to meld with foods in another.

To dehydrate foods successfully, an adjustable thermostat, heating element, automatic shut-off timer and suitable capacity are also important features to have available. The adjustable thermostat lets you set the correct temperature according to the food you are dehydrating.

Varied temperatures are required according to the individual foods you wish to dehydrate. A heating element keeps the food air at the right temperature to optimally dehydrate, and the automatic shut-off timer allows you to run the dehydrator overnight or during time away from home.

Dehydrator capacity varies from approximately 4 to 10+ square feet of space, either in stackable or slide-out trays. A removable-tray dehydrator with nine trays allows as much as 15 square feet of space. Figure your size requirement according to the amount of food you plan to dehydrate.

One-half pound of sliced strawberries, three sliced apples, three sliced bananas or two sliced tomatoes covers approximately one 1.5 square foot tray.

Picking the right size all depends on often you plan to use it, as well as how much food you’d like to dehydrate. If you buy or grow an abundance of fruits and veggies, then perhaps the larger 9-tray food dehydrators are the best fit for you. If you don’t plan on dehydrating a lot of food, then maybe the smaller dehydrators would be a better fit for you.

Storing & Rehydrating Dehydrated Foods

During storage, be sure to protect your dehydrated foods from heat, light and moisture. Any of these in excess may shorten the shelf life of the food. Once your food is dehydrated, allow it to cool to room temperature to avoid condensation inside packaging.

For best results, you should consider using a vacuum sealer to package dehydrated foods for storage. If a vacuum sealer is not available, you can use a Ziploc bag, but make sure you force out as much air as you can and seal it tightly.

Once your dehydrated food is bagged, place the items in a dark, cool and dry area. Do not[place in the freezer](http://www.compactappliance.com/freezers/), or you will notice ice crystals start to collect inside. To ensure overall quality, check your inventory weekly for a couple of weeks. When dehydrated adequately and stored in a vacuum seal, foods can last over 20 years.

To rehydrate foods, plan to place 1 cup of food in 1 cup of hot or cool water, depending on your planned use. Once this is completed, allow up to four hours for rehydration.

Use as you would normally in your recipe. If you’re using a [slow cooker to prepare your food](http://www.compactappliance.com/slow-cookers/), then just simply add your vegetables to the cooker, add the amount of water your recipe calls for and your veggies will rehydrate themselves.

Why You Should Try It

Dehydrating foods not only saves you money, but it is very simple and incredibly healthy.

Dehydrated foods not only retain their vitamin and mineral content, but they also have a shelf life that extends for decades. Following these simple guidelines assures success for beginners who are interested in the process.

For more specific recipes go to: <http://www.easy-food-dehydrating.com/dehydrating-fruit.html>