

Storing and Drying Vegetables Safely and Effectively

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Gardening season is in full swing! Whether you are a beginning or experienced gardener, shopping the farmer's market or visiting the region's local farms stands, the seasonal bounty is upon us! With an abundance of fresh produce available, why not try preserving the harvest by dehydrating it? To get the best overall product, there are several considerations to keep in mind. First, you'll want to select vegetables to be dried at their peak flavor and quality. Once produce is harvested, how you store it before preserving it matters. For example, fresh ripe tomatoes should not be stored in the refrigerator because they can become mealy and have poorer flavor. However, herbs can be stored in the refrigerator in plastic bags or placed upright in a glass of water and covered loosely with a plastic bag. Refer to *CSU Fact Sheet number 9.310 Food Storage for Safety and Quality* for a list of storage tips for different vegetables.

Blanching in boiling water or citric acid solution is recommended to enhance the quality and safety of dried vegetables. Blanching is a pretreatment that helps to slow enzyme activity in produce and helps it to dry faster, protect vitamins and color and reduces that time needed to refresh the vegetables before cooking. Keep in mind that different vegetables all have optimal blanching and drying times as well as dryness indicators. Refer to the *CSU Fact Sheet 9.308 Drying Vegetables* Table 2 for a list of recommendations and timing for blanching and drying for each vegetable type.

To blanch, fill a pot half full of water and bring to a boil. Lower prepared vegetables into boiling water to cover and start timer. When vegetables have been submerged for the recommended amount of time, remove and place in an ice water bath to cool. Drain with colander and blot dry before placing on food dehydrator.

The best dehydrators for home food drying have an adjustable thermostat and a fan that blows warm air over the food. Food should be pretreated, cut into uniform sizes and spread out evenly over the trays without overlapping or crowding. Remember to rotate trays throughout drying for consistency. When produce is done drying, make sure to do a dryness test before storage.

When the dried and cooled vegetables are ready for storage, pack them in small amounts in clean glass jars or in moisture and vapor proof freezer containers or bags. Label containers with the name of the product and date. Store in a cool, dry, dark place. When properly dried and stored, vegetables will keep well for six to twelve months.

For more food preservation information developed by Colorado State University Extension, please visit <https://apps.chhs.colostate.edu/preservesmart/> or download Preserve Smart on your mobile device.

References:

Kendall, Pat, et al. "Drying Vegetables - 9.308." *Extension*, 1 May 2018, extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/nutrition-food-safety-health/drying-vegetables-9-308/.

Kendall, P, and N Diamond. "Food Storage for Safety and Quality - 9.310." *Extension*, 25 Feb. 2016, extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/nutrition-food-safety-health/food-storage-for-safety-and-quality-9-310/.

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