

Dehydrated Food Storage Cheat Sheet



You've dehydrated and preserved your food, now what?

Not sure whether to use an oxygen absorber or just vacuum seal your dehydrated food? Which is better—a Mason jar or a Mylar bag? How about knowing the best location in your house to store your dehydrated food? If these are the questions rolling around in your head then this cheat sheet is for you!



Hi, I'm Jennifer from Self Reliant School. I've been dehydrating for over 10 years, and my husband and I teach growing your own food, cooking from scratch and preserving online. I've been fortunate and blessed to teach hundreds of people to dehydrate food safely and how to dehydrate frustration free. I'm so happy you're here, and I'm happy to help you in any way I can when it comes to dehydrating food for you and your family. There's nothing like providing tasteful nutritious food for your family year round.

It seems no matter what area of life we're talking about, storage is always an issue. Either there's not enough room, you don't have enough containers or the conditions are wrong. Food storage presents even more problems because we want to be sure to store things safely to consume them at a later date, so room, container and conditions become even more important. Dehydrated food presents some unique considerations because of its texture and need to remain dry.

In this cheat sheet I've taken some terms that are usually thrown around loosely and defined them, so we're all starting on the same page. After many years of trial and error, research and talking to other dehydrators I've learned some simple truths that I hope will help you with your food storage. In the end it is my hope that you develop your own system of storing dehydrated food based on safety, common sense and what works best for you family; however this cheat sheet is a starting place and will be a great reference to keep in your kitchen as a guide.

Short Term Storage

There are certain foods that contain a large amount of fat, like avocado and nuts, that can only be kept at room temperature for a relatively short amount of time. Those foods should not be dehydrated for long term storage. Also, certain food that we might make in the dehydrator are only safe to eat for a short time unless they are stored in the freezer, like fruit leathers or recipes with fat/oil like kale chips. Fruit leathers still have a good bit of moisture in them and kale chips have oils in them. So

these foods can be made and enjoyed on a short term basis. They can be stored under the best possible conditions with some of the methods I'm going to talk about below and their shelf life can be extended; however, they are not good candidates for long term storage. (Note: When I say short term storage I mean a period of one year or less.)

Long Term Storage

Of course we would all like to have our food storage last for the longest time possible. After all, wheat berries are rumored to last for 30 years or longer. However, I don't want to eat 30 year old wheat berries if I have a choice. So I recommend you rotate the food in your food storage piles. I personally do not keep food longer than 5 years. Long term storage is a term you'll have to define for yourself. Some people might be content with storing food for 10 years or longer, but I urge you to consider the possibility that your food might not last that long, and if it does it might not taste good. So before you store it and forget it, consider if you're willing to invest the money to have food available if you need it, but at the same time might never eat and essentially waste the time, money and the real estate it took to keep the food.



The Enemies of Food In Storage

Temperature

Warm and hot temperatures cause food to break down more quickly than if food were stored in a cooler or cold environment. That's the reason we all love our refrigerator.

Moisture

Water also speeds up decomposition and ruins dried foods.

Air

The air we breathe has many different things in it, like oxygen, carbon monoxide, moisture, and bacteria. All cause food to deteriorate.

Light

Light will also cause food to break down. Exposure to the sun is nature's way of signaling food (plants, seeds, etc) to break down and begin decomposing. Man-made light can simulate sunlight so all light should be avoided when putting food into storage.

Storage Methods

Airtight containers

When you take food out of the dehydrator you should place it in an airtight container like a glass storage container, a Mason jar or a plastic bag. If you prefer for your food not to touch plastic you can wrap the food in a brown paper bag before placing it into a plastic bag. Placing food in an airtight container will extend the shelf life of the food beyond how long it would last if you just left it on the dehydrator tray. That's why we close up bags of food after we've used a portion-



that and we also don't want them to spill all over the place. Your dehydrated food will last a good while stored like this provided at least 90%-95% of the moisture has been removed and there is no fat added or contained in the food. You can make a Mason jar airtight by placing a 300cc oxygen absorber in it before placing the lid and ring on it. You can also double bag food to remove as much oxygen as possible.

Vacuum Sealing

You can extend the life of food even longer if you vacuum seal it with a vacuum sealer. I own a FoodSaver and like it for the vacuum packing the food I dehydrate. There are others on the market, but the FoodSaver is a nice middle-of the road get the job done machine. The nice thing about the FoodSaver is that you can vacuum seal not only plastic bags but also Mason jars. In order to vacuum seal Mason jars you need to have an attachment. The FoodSaver jar attachment comes in regular mouth and wide mouth versions. Storing dehydrated food in Mason jars is my storage method of choice. I love the sustainability of a system that uses reusable materials. You can even reuse the Mason jar lids (for dry goods only not for home canning--I want to be clear) if you remove them carefully--I use a can opener or butter knife. Like I mentioned before, you can also buy special plastic bags and if you are storing dry goods they can be reused as well; however, they will not last as long as a Mason jar. You can also get plastic specially designed jars to use with your FoodSaver but they do not last as long as Mason jars either, and I



have personally stopped using them for food storage.

Want More?

Are you hooked on dehydrating? If you've read this far chances are you've fallen in love with this ancient form of preserving food.

Do you know all the foods you can dehydrate? Do you know what temperature to dehydrate food at and for how long? Would you like a handy chart of dehydrated to fresh equivalents? How about some easy to follow basic tutorials on how to dehydrate your favorite foods?

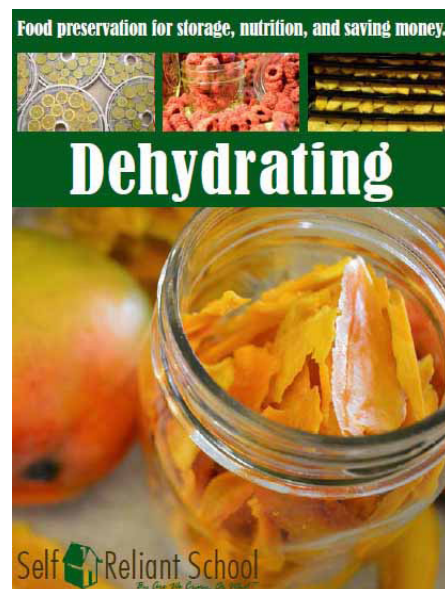
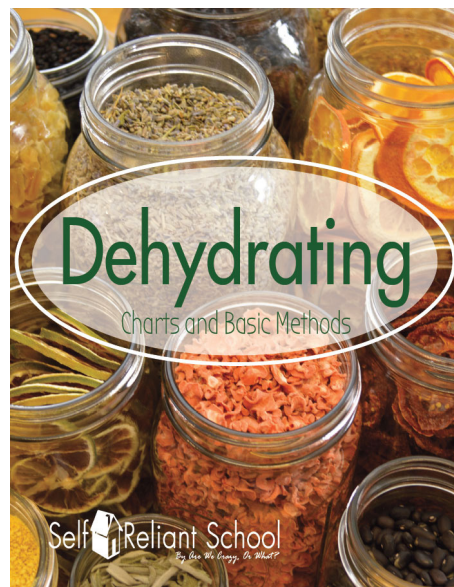
You can find these things and more in my book [Dehydrating Charts and Basic Methods](#). Then if you're really looking for a comprehensive eCourse on dehydrating we've got one inside the [Self Reliant School membership](#). I'll see you inside!

Here are the links:

<http://selfreliantschool.com/dryfooddft/>

<http://selfreliantschool.com/srs-membership/>

—Jennifer



Troubleshooting The FoodSaver

Vacuum sealing requires the machine to suck all the air out of the container and seal the container in some way, and sometimes people can run into problems with some food. Here are a few tips for making your vacuum sealing work correctly.

Clean your machine

Cleaning your vacuum sealer is the most important thing you can do to keep it in top working order. Food particles will sometimes get pulled up along with air and cause bags not to seal or clog the accessory hose. So frequent cleaning will solve many non-sealing problems

Vacuum Sealing Powder

If you are vacuum sealing a powder in a Mason jar simply placing a coffee filter (you can cut it to fit) on top of the food will help prevent the powder from being sucked through the accessory hose. One trick that works for me is that if I can't get a lid to seal I swap it out with another lid and that seems to work most of time. If you are sealing a powder in a plastic bag you can place the powder in a smaller plastic bag or brown paper bag first then place it into the vacuum sealer bag. This should solve most of your powder or spice vacuum sealing problems.

Food That Has Punctured The Vacuum Seal Bag

If you have food like potatoes that are dried and have rough edges that might rupture a bag you can place them in a brown paper bag then place them into the vacuum sealer bag. You can also use a regular plastic bag to place your food in and then place it into the vacuum seal bag, if you prefer.

Delicate Food

Sometimes a vacuum sealer can be so strong that it will crush your food. The newer FoodSavers have a setting that allows you to vacuum seal without so much force. However, if you don't have this feature I recommend you store delicate food in Mason jars, since the glass will not crush your food when the air is pulled out.

Store With Jars The Ring On

Occasionally a jar will become unsealed. You can periodically check your jars to make sure this doesn't happen. You can also store your jars with the ring on because often jars will "re-seal" themselves (again to be clear this is only for dehydrated dry goods not for home canning). Even though this is not ideal and air has entered the jar, there is not continued air circulation and your food will still have a longer shelf life than if the lid just came unsealed and was left laying on the top of the jar.

Mylar Bags

Another option for storing your food is to place it in Mylar bags. This is ideal for long term storage since the bags are rugged, dark,



and can easily be made airtight. You can place your mylar bags filled with food in 5 gallon buckets for stacking and portability. Mylar bags can be sealed with a vacuum sealer. It's a bit tricky and you may prefer to just use an iron (I've seen this done but have not had much luck with it myself). In order to make a Mylar bag airtight you need to place an oxygen absorber in the bag before you seal it. For 5 gallon Mylar bags use a 2000cc oxygen absorber and for 1 gallon Mylar bags or smaller you can use 300cc.

If you are unsure of what kind of storage method is best and you're scared your food might spoil you can always place it in the refrigerator or in the freezer. I actually recommend all of your dehydrated food be placed in the freezer for 3 to 14 days. This is a form of "pasteurization" in the sense that it will kill bacteria that might have gotten on your food during the dehydrating process. Placing your food in the freezer will also kill any insect eggs that may have gotten into your food during dehydration, especially if you moved your dehydrator outside to dehydrate onions or garlic.

Note: placing food in the freezer will not kill all bacteria and safe food handling should always be practiced when dealing with perishable food like meat or produce.

Labeling

One thing that will help you with your food rotation is labeling your bags, jars, buckets or other containers. Labeling will also help other people in your family find things much easier, especially young ones that are eager to help.

Your Bags

To label your vacuum sealed bags simply make the bags a little bigger than you normally would; this allows you plenty of space for reusing them. Then label the bag on the part of the plastic that you will cut off to break the seal. [Or you can use labels found here.](#)

Your Jars

Often I just use a sharpie to label my jars but sometimes the ink wears off over time. [Or you can use labels found here.](#)

Your Buckets And Other Containers

Labeling your 5 gallon buckets is very important because you cannot see through them, and often they are stacked on top of each other. So labeling will save you a lot of frustration, plus the labor of moving all those buckets to see what's in them.



What Information Should You Include On Your Label?

Label your food with: what the container contains, the date, then what amounts to cook with (i.e. 1 cup equals 1 T dry). You could give an expiration date if that fits into your system.

Odd and Ends

Food Grade Plastic Buckets

Be sure you purchase (sometimes you can get them for free) food grade plastic buckets. Some people might assume that if you use a Mylar bag in your bucket it really doesn't matter if the bucket is food grade or not. That may be. Your food is protected by a Mylar bag. However, if you intend to have these buckets for a long time, in my experience it's a greater pain to have to remember which of my buckets are food grade and which ones are not when I go to reuse them. I find just having a policy of using all food grade buckets makes for less worrying about chemicals from plastics seeping into my food. The food grade buckets come in different sizes with the most popular being the 5 gallon size.

Oxygen Absorber

The bag holding your oxygen absorbers needs to be resealed after opening if you are not going to use the entire pack. To reseal them just vacuum pack them with your vacuum sealer. If you do not have a vacuum sealer be sure to plan to pack a lot of Mylar bags or place them in many jars at one time. That way you'll use the entire pack and won't need to reseal them.

Many of these items are on my product recommendation list. I update my product lists on a regular basis because prices and availability change. [Click here to access links to the products I recommend.](#)

—Jennifer