



Drying Fruit Leathers¹

Susan Reynolds²

Fruit leathers are homemade fruit rolls. They are a tasty chewy, dried fruit product. Fruit leathers are made by pouring pursed fruit onto a flat surface for drying. When dried, the fruit is pulled from the surface and rolled. It gets the name "leather" from the fact that when the pursed fruit is dried, it is shiny and has the texture of leather.

The advantages of making your own fruit leathers are to save money use less sugar and to mix fruit flavors. Leftover fruit pulp from making jelly can be blended and made into fruit rolls.

For the diabetic adult or child, fruit leathers made without sugar are a healthy choice for snacks or desserts. Individual fruit leathers should contain the amount of fruit allowed for the fruit exchange.

Directions follow for making fruit leathers. Fresh, frozen or drained canned fruit can be used.

LEATHERS FROM FRESH FRUIT

- Select ripe or slightly overripe fruit.
- Wash fresh fruit or berries in cool water. Remove peel, seeds and stem.
- Cut fruit into chunks. Use 2 cups of fruit for each 13" X 15" fruit leather. Purse fruit until smooth.
- Add 2 teaspoons of lemon juice or 1/8 teaspoon ascorbic acid (375 mg) for each 2 cups of light colored fruit to prevent darkening.

- Optional: To sweeten, add corn syrup, honey or sugar. Corn syrup or honey is best for longer storage because it prevents crystals. Sugar is fine for immediate use or short storage. Use ¼ to ½ cup sugar, corn syrup or honey for each 2 cups of fruit. Saccharin-based sweeteners could also be used to reduce tartness without adding calories. Aspartame sweeteners may lose sweetness during drying.

LEATHERS FROM CANNED OR FROZEN FRUIT

- Home preserved or store-bought canned or frozen fruit can be used.
- Drain fruit, save liquid.
- Use 1 pint of fruit for each 13" X 15" leather.
- Purse fruit until smooth. If thick, add liquid.
- Add 2 teaspoons of lemon juice or 1/8 teaspoon ascorbic acid (375 mg) for each 2 cups of light colored fruit to prevent darkening.
- Applesauce can be dried alone or added to any fresh fruit purse as an extender. It decreases tartness and makes the leather smoother and more pliable.

PREPARING THE TRAYS

For drying in the oven a 13" X 15" cookie pan with edges works well. Line pan with plastic wrap being careful to smooth out wrinkles. Do not use waxed paper or aluminum foil.

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 2. Susan Reynolds, M.S., former Extension Foods Specialist, University of Georgia; revised by Judy Harrison, Ph.D., Extension Food Specialist, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Athens. For more information contact your local Extension Service agent.

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To dry in a dehydrator, specially designed plastic sheets can be purchased or plastic trays can be lined with plastic wrap.

POURING THE LEATHER

Fruit leathers can be poured into a single large sheet (13 " X 15 ") or into several smaller sizes. Spread puree evenly about 1/8-inch thick, onto drying tray. Avoid pouring puree too close to the edge of the cookie sheet. The larger fruit leathers take longer to dry. Approximate drying times are 6 to 8 hours in a dehydrator, up to 18 hours in an oven and 1 to 2 days in the sun.

DRYING THE LEATHER

Dry fruit leathers at 140°F. Leather dries from the outside edge toward the center. Test for dryness by touching center of leather; no indentation should be evident. While warm, peel from plastic and roll, allow to cool and rewrap the roll in plastic.

Chances are the fruit leather won't last long enough for storage. If it does, it will keep up to 1 month at room temperature. For storage up to 1 year, place tightly wrapped rolls in the freezer.

Spices, Flavors and Garnishes

To add interest to your fruit leathers; spices, flavorings or garnishes can be added.

Spices to Try

Allspice, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, ginger, mace, mint, nutmeg or pumpkin pie spice. Use sparingly, start with 1/8 teaspoon for each 2 cups of puree.

Flavorings to Try

Almond extract, lemon juice, lemon peel, lime juice, lime peel, orange extract, orange juice, orange peel or vanilla extract. Use sparingly, try 1/8 to 1/4 teaspoon for each 2 cups of puree.

Delicious Additions to Try

Shredded coconut, chopped dates, other dried chopped fruits, granola, miniature marshmallows, chopped nuts, chopped raisins, poppy seeds, sesame seeds or sunflower seeds.

Fillings to Try

Melted chocolate, softened cream cheese, cheese spreads, jam, preserves, marmalade, marshmallow cream or peanut butter. Spread one or more of these on the leather after it's dried and then roll. Store in refrigerator.