

Sun Drying Fruit - Fruit of the Spirit

Child: 'I'm hungry Mum. Can I have something to eat?'

Mother: 'Sunny, you'll just have to wait till we get home. I haven't got any food left.'

Aunt: 'I can help, Frida, I have some dried fruit in my shoulder bag. I always take some when I travel a long way in case someone gets hungry. I keep it in a plastic bag.'

Child: 'Please Mum, can I have some of Aunt Rosa's dried fruit?'

Mother: 'Of course you can. But remember to say "Thank you". What a good idea Rosa...I think I'll buy some for our next big trip.'

Aunt: 'Don't buy some, just make it yourself. I dry my own fruit. Would you like me to teach you how to do it?'

Mother: Oh yes...that would be great!

Carol: Welcome to *Women of Hope*, I'm Carol. So, what do you think of Rosa's idea – taking some dried fruit along when she's travelling somewhere? ...Do you like dried fruit Tammy?

Tammy: Oh yes, I love it – in fact I used to do the same as Rosa when my children were smaller...take some in a plastic bag.

Carol: And it's so delicious! I like it because I like sweet things and I love fruit. It's a perfect combination. But I also like to eat things that are good for me.

Tammy: So do I. Do *you* like to eat dried fruit? ...Today we'll share some ideas about how to sun-dry your own fruit.

Sometimes when I'm hungry and it's not time for a meal I have a little snack of some dried apricots or dried apple. I know it's good for me...and it's better than eating sweets or other really sugary things.

Carol: Oh it sure is...but let's talk about why dried fruit is so good for us!

Tammy: Well, it's good for us mainly because it's fruit...and fruit IS good for us. It has a lot of vitamins and minerals that our bodies need. And dried fruit has almost the same vitamins and minerals as raw fruit.

Carol: Fresh fruit is very good for us, because...it gives us quick energy through its natural sugars...and it has lots of fibre, or bulk, which helps our digestive system work well.

The good news about *dried fruit* is that it's just as full of fibre and gives us just as much energy, and most of the vitamins and minerals are still there after the fruit has been dried. So one whole dried fruit gives us the same nutrition as a whole fresh fruit of the same type. But the dried fruit is high in sugar so only eat a little if you have diabetes or you're trying to lose weight.

Tammy: And of course because it's smaller it takes up much less space to store than fresh fruit does. And it will keep for a long time...a lot longer than fresh fruit.. And because fresh fruit usually grows in one season we often have more than we can eat. So you can dry it and store it away to be used later when there's not so much fresh fruit available.

Carol: Welcome back to WOH. I wonder if you know how to sun-dry fruit? I don't, so let's find out from Tammy. She's been doing some research on how to do it so she could share it with us. We're all ears, Tammy.

Tammy: You'll be pleased to know it's not hard to do...but you *do* have to take some special care to make sure it dries properly and stays clean. And the weather is important too. If you plan to dry some fruit you need to know that there will be 3 to 5 nice hot, sunny days in a row. And they need to be days that are not too humid.

It's important that the drying process is not interrupted and that the fruit does *not* cool down and then heat up again because this could make it go mouldy.

Carol: So if you live in a cold climate you won't be able to dry fruit in the sun. But then your fresh fruit will last longer than if you live somewhere very warm.

Tammy: Yes...you need hot, dry weather. Now let me explain how to make a simple food dryer that uses the sun's heat to dry fruit. Of course you could just use wire cake or cookie racks with some loosely-woven cloth on top. But here's a drying tray you could make...

You'll need a wooden frame, some wire or plastic mesh or loosely woven cloth, a hammer and some small nails. Your frame can be a rectangle of wood from an old window, or a picture, a screen door, or a box. If it already has mesh on it leave that on it. The bigger it is the more fruit you can dry at one time of course. Scrub it well with soap and water. Then rinse it with clean water and let it dry.

Now stretch the mesh over the frame and fasten it to the back of the frame with staples, tacks or small nails. If you are just using cloth, stretch a few strings across diagonally and staple them on. This will strengthen it. If it's a metal screen put some loosely-woven cloth on top of the metal so the fruit won't touch the metal. Don't use solid metal trays because the air must be able to circulate all around the food so it dries from the top and the bottom at the same time.

Have some extra cloth ready to cover the fruit while it's drying to keep insects away from the fruit.

Carol: Mmm...I think I could make one of those with an old screen door I have at home. So once you have a drying tray what's next?

Tammy: Think about what fruit *you* could dry... It's important to choose good fruit that's ripe but *not over-ripe*. Where I live, I could use apricots, mangoes, bananas, apples, peaches, pears and pineapple...and of course tomatoes – which are really a fruit not a vegetable. Before you start preparing your fruit, take off any rings or bangles you have on and wash your hands with soap and water. Make sure your fingernails are short and clean. If you're sick or have a wound on your hand it's best not to prepare dried fruit until you're well again or the wound has healed.

To prepare your fruit for drying you need to cut large fruit into thin slices, all the same thickness. Cut small fruit and tomatoes into halves.

Carol: Some fruit goes brown very quickly after cutting it...I usually soak Apples, bananas, peaches and pears in lemon, lime or pineapple juice for 5 minutes before placing them on the tray when I serve them. Does that work for drying as well?

Tammy: It does! And soaking apples, bananas, peaches or pears is exactly what you should do. But apricots and pineapple don't go brown, so they don't need to be soaked first. And for tomatoes, sprinkle the cut side with salt, which helps to preserve them. Put your drying tray in a place where it will get plenty of direct sunshine throughout the day. Put it up high where animals can't reach it. And choose a place that's not dusty...or near a road with cars or motorbikes making fumes that will get into the fruit. Now place the fruit on the tray so the pieces are not touching each other and put a loosely-woven cloth over the top to keep insects off.

Carol: That sounds pretty easy. After doing that should we just leave the racks there for a few days?

Tammy: Yes, it will take a few days for the fruit to dry but there are a few more things you need to do... One very important thing is to either cover the fruit with a thick covering each night or bring it inside. It's important that it does *not* take in moisture in the cool of the night.

Carol: That's right...you told us that it will get mouldy if it gets damp.

Tammy: And, of course, don't forget to uncover it the next morning or put it back outside! And, before you do, turn the fruit over using tongs or clean hands.

Carol: So How will we know when our fruit is dry enough?

Tammy: You can check how dry the fruit is by cutting a piece. It should be a bit like leather. There should be no moisture inside. If you try eating a piece it should be chewy. When you think it's almost dry enough, put it in an airy, shady place for the last part of the drying, so it doesn't get scorched by the sun. Tomatoes need to be very dry, unless you can store them in a fridge.

Carol: So, is that it? Is it ready to store for eating later?

Tammy: Almost...it just needs one more thing.... Let the fruit cool down – somewhere inside in a cool place. Then put all the fruit in a large bowl and stir it a few times each day for a week. This is called 'equalizing'. This will allow any last drops of moisture that remain in any pieces to be spread equally among all the fruit.

Another way of doing this is to put the fruit in paper bags and fold the tops over. Then hang these from a clothesline and gently shake them a few times each day for a few days. And then...you'll be pleased to hear – your fruit will be ready to store.

Carol: So where is the best place to store this lovely dried fruit? We don't want it to spoil...or to let any rats or mice get at it do we?

Tammy: No! ...After all our careful drying, we want to be able to enjoy it later. So, store it in small batches...then if there's one moist piece it won't spoil **all** your fruit. Use containers with tight-fitting lids and store it in a dark place, or put the containers inside paper bags. If the containers have metal lids, put a piece of paper between the fruit and the lids. Keep them in a cool place. Check for mould each week for the first few weeks. Then, they're ready to eat!

Carol: Now that's what I've been waiting for. I can almost taste the delicious fruit. How about you, my friend, does this make you want to try drying some fruit so you can enjoy eating it later?

Tammy: This method works well for fruit but it's not suitable for vegetables as they don't have such a high sugar content. I hope you'll enjoy drying some of your local fruit and even more – that you'll enjoy eating it!

Carol: Welcome to you Katherine. You've been here before haven't you!

Katherine: Yes I have. I love coming to share stories with you...

Carol: You told us one day about a terrible storm when your house was damaged and you were living alone.

Katherine: I did...and my grown up children took great care of me. They showed God's love to me in a very practical way.

Tammy: And another time you told us the story of the children you adopted from another country. You had some very hard times then, but God gave you great love for those children and taught you to be patient and kind.

Katherine: He did...and my birth children learned to be kind and loving and care for these little ones too when everything was so strange and new to them.

Carol: And then you came back another time and told us about your daughter and how she was having some real problems in her marriage...and her marriage came to an end. It must have been hard for you to know how to help her.

Katherine: Yes...that's when I really learned self-control. There was so much I wanted to say to her and so much advice I wanted to give. But God showed me how to 'hold my tongue' and just listen...and wait for her to ask before giving any advice.

Tammy: Do you have another story for us today Katherine?

Katherine: Yes I do. You've been talking today about fruit...sun-drying fruit. It's been interesting – I learned a lot about how I could sun-dry some fruit, but only in the very hot months. Today I want to tell you something about special 'fruit' that we read about in God's word, the Bible. But before I do, let me tell you about my neighbor, Ruth who visited me a long time ago when my children were small.

I was very busy with household tasks, rushing around and scolding my children, when Ruth knocked on my door. When I opened it she said, "I hope you like strawberries...I picked more than I can use. I don't want them to spoil." "Oh thank you so much," I said as I took the strawberries, "these are my favorite. I have guests coming for dinner, I'll make a strawberry pie." "I'm so glad you can use them," Ruth said with a smile.

I shared some fresh strawberries with the children as I made the pie. And when our guests came we all enjoyed the pie together.

Later, I thought about how my neighbor, Ruth is like a kind of fruit I read about in God's word, the Bible. It tells about the "fruit of the spirit". God's word tells us that when we believe in Jesus he sends his Spirit to live in us. Let me read it to you:

(Galatians 5: 22&23) The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

My friend Ruth is that kind of person. She shows love to all her friends (like bringing me the strawberries) and she always seems to be full of joy though she has some very hard things in her life. She hardly ever gets angry over things that upset the rest of us, and I've never seen anyone who had more patience with her children. That shows a lot of kindness and self-control. I'd like to have been more like Ruth when my family was growing up. They would have been a lot happier, I'm sure.

As I thought about all this, I remembered a story in God's Word about another woman named Ruth. (Book of Ruth) She was probably very young when her husband died leaving her alone, without any children. She was living with her mother-in-law who was also a widow, and a very unhappy woman. When Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, moved back to her home town, Ruth went with her, leaving behind her own parents and family. Can you imagine that? Ruth really loved Naomi. She was very faithful to her. She went right to work in a field to get enough grain for them to eat. The owner of the field noticed her patient, hard work, and ordered his workers to be kind to her and help her to get all the food she needed.

And the most wonderful thing happened! That kind man fell in love with her and married her. Ruth invited Naomi to live with her and her new husband. Later, Ruth had a baby boy and grandmother Naomi helped take care of him.

God's Word tells us that his Spirit in our hearts makes us want to be like him. That means we'll learn to show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in all the places we go and things we do. If we love God's Son, Jesus, he will give us his Spirit and will help us to be like Ruth in the story...and like my neighbor.

Dear friend, do you long for peace, as Ruth did when her husband died and left her alone? Do you wish you had happiness that comes from inside...called joy? Do you need patience in dealing with your children, husband or neighbors? And do you wish you could say kind and good words to replace those harsh words you just said? That takes self-control. We all need this fruit in our lives don't we!

God's Word says that we can ask Jesus, God's Son to come and live in our hearts by his Spirit, and he will change our spirits to become more like his. You'll be amazed, one day, when someone says an unkind word to you, or cheats you out of something you need, or forgets a promise—that you will be able to show love... joy... peace... patience... kindness... goodness...faithfulness...gentleness and self-control...even in the worst circumstances.

It's not because you're suddenly perfect, but because Jesus loves you so much, he wants to live in you and help you to be full of fruit you can share...not real fruit like strawberries, but all the other fruit of God's Spirit. You can share that fruit each day, because of Jesus.

Carol: Thank you Katherine.

Tammy: We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

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