

Sun Dried Tomatoes

Materials Needed:

- Tomatoes
- Cutting board
- Knives
- Framed plastic screen
- Cheesecloth
- Plastic bags (ziplock) or airtight glass jars and lids

To Sun Dry:



Carefully wash and dry your tomatoes first. Cut them in half lengthwise for plum and cherry tomatoes. For larger tomatoes, slice them across the axis in 1/2" thick slices. You can remove seeds if you like but it is not necessary. If you do remove the seeds, try to be careful not to remove the flavorful pulp. Use a spoon or your fingers to scoop out the seeds. Cutting a slit in the skin side of the tomato will help accelerate the drying process.

Place the halves or slices skin side down on a framed plastic screen (we use our seed drying trays for this), being careful not to lose any liquid from them and spread them out so that none are touching. You can salt them at this time for a little more flavor and the salt will help to draw the liquid from them. The drying process will concentrate the entire flavor in the juice. Use a cheesecloth cover over the screen to protect the tomatoes from bugs and crud. Raise the cheesecloth off the tomatoes slightly with wood skewers or something like that. Then place the screen outside in the sun with some boards or something else to raise it a few inches off the ground and allow air to circulate underneath it. It will take at least a few days of sunshine (sometimes up to 12 days) to properly dry the tomatoes. You need to bring the whole set up indoors overnight, once the sun goes down.



The Results: When your tomatoes have dried properly they will have a dark red color. If using yellow, pink, white, etc. tomatoes they will have a darker, more intense color than they originally had. They should feel dry and pliable or leathery to the touch. They should not be hard and brittle or moist. You should be able to stick your finger in the center of them, pull it away and have no pulp on your finger.



Storage: Now that you have made it this far, here is how you store them. Your dehydrated tomatoes take little space to store. They can be stored in plastic bags or airtight glass jars. For plastic bags, pack the tomatoes as tightly as you can, squeezing out the excess air. If you have a vacuum sealer it would be perfect for this. For glass jars, pack them as compactly as you can and use a tight fitting lid to seal. We use our canning jars for this. Either way, they can be stored at room temperature in a cool, dark place in the kitchen cabinets or wherever you have

room. They will keep well for about one year. After that the flavor and nutritional value will begin to decline. You may keep them for about 18 months if you wrap them securely in plastic and store in the freezer.

To Oven Dry:

The weather must cooperate for sun drying. If this is not the case in your area, oven drying is your solution! It does require a bit more of a set up. Using uniform tomatoes sizes will simplify your results. Preheat oven to 130° F or the lowest setting on a gas oven. On some brands of ovens 130° F will be the warm or low setting. If your oven only goes down to 200° F then you will need to leave the door ajar while drying. Prepare your tomatoes as previously stated. Omit the cheesecloth and place them on foil lined cookie sheets or pizza pans as above. Put your pans directly on the oven racks. Alternately you could cover the oven racks with aluminum foil into which you will need to punch small holes for air circulation. Bake in a closed, preheated oven at 130° F for 6 to 12 hours until the tomatoes are shriveled and slightly pliable. Check on them periodically and remove any that are done. After taking them out of the oven, place them on racks until they have cooled down completely.

For cherry tomatoes: cut in half, prepare as above always putting the cut side down on your racks. Cut the drying time to 3-4 hours.

Dehydrator Drying:

You have to spend some money to get a dehydrator but many think it gives dried foods a superior quality. There are many units available that won't set you back a lot. It all depends on what you want. They can have timers and thermostats or you can use a thermometer, which you place on the lowest tray to monitor temperature. You want it to ideally stay around 135° to 140°F. You do all the prep as already stated and the trays should have a space of 1-2 inches between them. You still may need to rotate the racks and, in this case, turn the tomatoes.