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Drying Plums

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Fresh plums hold their shape when dried because of a dense flesh and thick skin. Dried plums were traditionally preserved by Native Americans to use as a garnish with wild fowl and game and to prepare wojapi (plum pudding).

To prepare for drying, the pit is removed by splitting the fruit in half; the halves are then set on a screen to dry.

Safe food handling tips

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water before harvesting and handling the fruit.
- To avoid cross-contamination, wear disposable gloves while handling the plums. Gloves should be used for only one task, dispose of them after use.
- All equipment and containers should be washed with hot, soapy water and either air dried or dried with a clean cloth towel or paper towels. This includes harvesting containers, bowls, dehydrator trays, and/or sun-drying screens.
- Work area should be thoroughly cleaned with hot, soapy water and sanitized with a mixture of 1 teaspoon bleach to 1 quart of water. Spray the mixture on the surface and wipe off with a clean cloth or air dry.

Selecting plums for drying

- Wild plums ready to harvest will easily fall off the bush and will spring back when squeezed between fingers.
- Gather fruit in a clean container that has only been used for food.
- Do not pick fruit off the ground.

Preparing plums for drying

- Wash plums with water that is the same temperature as the fruit (not too cold or too hot).
- Remove any stems or leaves.
- Gently cut open the plum and push the pit out.
- Always place fruit in a clean bowl.

Drying with a food dehydrator

- Lay the plums on a dehydrator tray. Do not overlap or have the plums touching. Shrinkage will occur throughout the drying process.
- Plums will take 24–36 hours to dry. To be considered dry, there will be no visible moisture, they will not be sticky, and they will have lost approximately 80% moisture.
- Do not interrupt the drying process by turning off the dehydrator.

Sun-drying plums (Prepare plums as described above)

Equipment needed

- Use two large screens of equal size, a piece of sheer fabric a little larger than the screens, and rocks or other heavy objects to secure the screens.
- Screens should be of a material that is safe for contact with food: stainless steel, Teflon-coated fiberglass, or plastic.
- Lay plums on the screen, cover with the sheer fabric and the second screen. Place rocks on the frame around the screen.

Drying process

- Favorable weather conditions would be wind (at least a slight breeze), temperatures of 80–90°F, and lots of sunshine. These conditions would ensure the plums

will be dry in 4 to 5 days. If the conditions are not ideal, the drying process can still be completed but may take longer.

- In the evening, put the plums in an air-tight container and store in the refrigerator to prevent spoilage until the next drying day.

Wojapi

2 cups dried plums (fresh, frozen, or canned can be substituted)

* Raspberries, blueberries, and cherries can be substituted.

1 1/2 cups water, divided

1/2 cup sugar

2 tablespoons corn starch

1. Rehydrate plums by putting plums in a bowl and pouring enough water over to cover. Let sit for 30 to 60 minutes until plums are plump. Pour off remaining water, reserve to use in step 2.

If using fresh, frozen, or canned fruit, use 2 cups and begin with step 2.

2. In a medium saucepan, combine plums with 1 1/4 cups water (measure reserved water and add enough to equal 1 1/4 cups). Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Lower heat.
3. Add sugar.
4. In a cup or small bowl, mix cornstarch with remaining 1/4 cup water. Add mixture to sweetened plums; blend well. Cook over low heat for about 4 minutes to thicken, stirring constantly, until consistency of a very thick sauce.
5. Serve hot. Can be served with fry bread or as a sauce with meat.

Yield: 4 cups

Serving size: 1/2 cup

Servings per recipe: 8

Nutrient content per serving:

Calories: 120

Fat: 0g

Cholesterol: 0mg

Sodium: 5mg

Carbohydrates: 33g

Fiber: 2g

Protein: 1g

Resources:

Northern Plains Indian Food Practices, Customs and Holidays, American Dietetic Association

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