

## Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

# Fall forward and waste not



Sliced apples on the dehydrator trays.

By Cynthia Brian

*“And all at once, summer collapsed into fall.” – Oscar Wilde*

In the fall of my freshman year at UCLA, I began working at one of the very first health food stores ever created in California. It was called Nature’s Health Cove and all the offerings were organic: pesticide, insecticide, and colorant-free. The fruits and vegetables were pathetic looking. Worms bored into apples, the Swiss chard had holes from munching snails, greens boasted fringed tips, a gift from hungry marauding rabbits, tomatoes were cracked, zucchini was malformed. Yet the produce tasted delicious and even though the prices were at least double of anything one could purchase at a grocery store, the crops sold rapidly. One of my tasks was to cull through any severely damaged items, putting them in a bucket for a compost pickup by an urban farmer.

Having worked in the fruit drying yards and big barn dehydrators growing up on our farm, it dawned on me that usually, half or more of any fruit or vegetable is salvageable. I suggested to the owner that perhaps we could cut out the decaying parts and create healthy drinks and dried snacks with the ripe remainders. The initiative became an instant success with both students and the general public clamoring for a revolving menu of inexpensive tasty treats.

As summer collapses into fall, my trees and vines are heavy with fruit. As much as I eat and give away, there is still more for the picking. I detest waste and besides canning and freezing the extras, I wanted to create some of the dried fruits of my youth.

While cleaning out one of our barns this summer, I came upon a vintage portable dehydrator that my grandfather used eons ago to dry his autumn bounty of pears, apples, figs and grapes. I cleaned the appli-



Asian Pears are bountiful.

Photo Cynthia Brian

ance and set to work slicing and dicing.

The results were phenomenal.

If you’ve bought any dried fruit lately, you know how expensive it is. But if you are like me and enjoy DIY projects, I have a simple recipe for you to create your own personal organic fruit leathers. You can use trays and dry your produce in the sun the way it has been done for centuries, but it takes longer and critters may creep in to steal your sweets. My suggestion is to purchase a small dehydrator with four or five drawers. My dehydrator has four drawers and only a single heat setting. My thermometer says it’s dehydrating at 125 degrees, which is perfect. Every three hours I move the drawers from the bottom to the top. From start to finish, it takes 24 hours. If you buy a dehydrator with adjustable temperature settings, you’ll be able to dehydrate more rapidly.

### Here’s what to do:

1. Wash and pat dry your desired fruit and vegetables.
2. You can peel if you wish, but I don’t. Cut away any bruised or damaged parts. Cut into slices about ¼ to ½ inch thick.
3. Some vegetables including eggplant, cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, zucchini, potatoes and radishes need to be blanched for a few minutes.
4. Cut the slices in a bowl and toss with lemon juice or apple vinegar to reduce browning. Although this step is optional, it helps in preservation.
5. Spray the trays with a light spritz of canola or olive oil to prevent sticking.
6. Place slices of the same fruit or vegetable on dehydrator racks in a single layer without overlapping. Use different trays for different varieties.

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