Home & Trail

An Introduction to Drying Food

By Chef Glenn McAllister
Home & Trail:
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Introduction

Months before leaving for my first thirty-day hike on the Appalachian Trail, I asked my friend, Jimmy, how his freeze-dried meal tasted. He said, “Not bad for backpacking food.” Not bad. If we were eating freeze-dried food on the space station, not bad might be good, but we were sitting around a campfire listening to owls hoot. I ate homemade chili that night. Like an astronaut, all I had to do was rehydrate it with hot water. After supper, I made pumpkin pie.

Photo Above: Beef & Bean Chili and Unstuffed Peppers.
A great view deserves a great meal. View from Wesser Bald Fire Tower in North Carolina where I cooked dinner and breakfast.

Days on the Appalachian Trail should end—and begin—with a delicious, healthy meal, not a pot of not bad. To that end, I spent many evenings, after work, mastering the art of drying food. Some people learned karate; I dried food. Drying hard-boiled eggs, maple syrup, and peanut butter didn’t work out. I dried a fish from my pond. He didn’t see that coming. Mostly, I dried food from the store that didn’t need catching: meat, vegetables, beans, fruit, potatoes, pasta, and rice. Mixing a little of this and that, I worked out the proportion of peas to potatoes for cottage pie. The menu expanded to thirty entrees. My favorite was unstuffed peppers—ground beef and peppers with rice in tomato sauce—because it reminded me of my mother’s recipe, which my sisters and I always loved with a slice of rye bread and butter.
During the month before leaving for thirty days on the trail, I dried ninety meals and vacuum sealed them into daily rations. I mailed five boxes ahead—four to hostels and one to a post office. Eight days’ worth of food went into my backpack with the gear: pot, stove, fuel, tarp, sleeping bag, sleeping pad, water filter, water bottles, clothing, first aid, toothbrush, toilet paper, etc.

*Photo Above: Dried meals and snacks packed and vacuum sealed for thirty days on the trail.*

Fully loaded with gear, food, and water, the pack weighed thirty-five pounds—the average weight of a four-year-old riding piggyback. The pack would have weighed considerably more if I had not dried the meals. I ate like a king every day on the trail, from Northern Tennessee through most of North Carolina.
Food Drying 101

Drying food is easy. After a little prep work—slicing, dicing, and sometimes precooking the food—the dehydrator takes over and removes the moisture while you are freed to do other things. Most food dries within six to sixteen hours. Just set the timer and come back later. Juicy fruits take the longest time; starches like beans take the least time. I often dry one load during the day and a second load overnight.

Choosing a Dehydrator

The two most important components that a food dehydrator must have are a fan (shown below) and adjustable temperature control. A fan whisks away heated moisture so the food doesn’t take forever to dry. Adjustable temperature control allows you to dry different foods at the recommended temperatures.

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I use a nine-tray Excalibur dehydrator to dry all the food for my Appalachian Trail hikes. It’s a box with square trays that slide in and out. Another type of dehydrator, offered by Nesco, is round with stacking trays. I like the Excalibur dehydrator because the square shape of the trays provides more drying capacity than round trays. Sliding trays make it easier to check on food compared to the stacking trays of round dehydrators. Liquefied foods are also easier to spread on the square trays since there is no hole in the middle like the round dehydrators.

Photo Above: Excalibur Dehydrator with convenient square trays that slide in and out.

Read my review comparing Excalibur to Nesco Dehydrators
Recommended Temperature Settings

Raw Meat—165° F (74° C) *

Cooked Meat—145° F (63° C)

Fruit—135° F (57° C)

Vegetables—125° F (52° C)

Starches—125° F (52° C)

*I didn’t dry raw meat for my meals.

Photo Above: Raw bell peppers and red onions on Excalibur Trays. Dice vegetables as uniformly as possible and spread in a single layer. Dehydrate vegetables at 125° F (52° C)
Healthy Foods to Dry

Meat
I dehydrate ground beef, ground turkey, deli ham, canned chicken, tuna, imitation crab, and shrimp. Early on, I discovered that cooked-and-dehydrated ground beef did not rehydrate well in meals—it stayed hard like gravel. I fixed that problem with the meatball principle—add breadcrumbs to ground beef before cooking and drying it. With breadcrumbs dried inside the meat, the ground beef rehydrates perfectly in meals. For each pound of ground beef, add a half cup of fine breadcrumbs. The breadcrumb trick also works well for ground chicken and turkey.

Estimated drying time: 6 – 10 hours @ 145°F (63°C)

Photo Above: Breadcrumbs were added to this ground beef before cooking it. It will rehydrate well after drying it.
The usual ways of cooking chicken—frying, grilling, and baking—all led to chicken that did not rehydrate well after it was dried. It was very tough. The one form of chicken that did rehydrate well after drying was canned chicken. I believe it was the pressure canning of the chicken that made the difference.

It is essential to only dry meat with low fat content. Since most of the meat I dry is naturally low in fat, this mainly applies to ground beef. Use lean ground beef with fat content in the seven-to ten-percent range. Too much fat in the meat could lead to rancidity over time as the fat reacts with oxygen. To ensure that the meat in my meals stays healthy, I vacuum seal it.

Photo Above: Dried ground beef, chicken, ham, tuna, shrimp, and crabmeat.
Vegetables
Some of the vegetables I dehydrate are frozen—peas, green beans, corn, okra, and mixed vegetables. I steam them for six minutes before drying them. Those vegetables can also be dried fresh when in season. I also lightly steam broccoli and carrots. Steaming gives those two vegetables a nice dark color. My preferred method of cutting carrots for dehydration is julienne-style—about an inch long. To dry vegetables efficiently, cut them uniformly and spread them on the dehydrator trays without too much overlap. Vegetables such as tomatoes, bell peppers, and onions can be dried raw. Just cut them into uniform pieces.

Photo Above: All kinds of dried vegetables, beans, starches, and meat can be combined to make healthy meals.
**Fruit**

I dry apples, bananas, pears, peaches, strawberries, mangoes, grapes, and pineapples to use in oatmeal, desserts, and snacks. Ever since I started hiking with a thermos food jar, I make fruit cocktails by rehydrating a mix of dried fruit after lunch. To dehydrate any fruit, cut it into pieces about a quarter inch thick and spread it out in a single layer on the dehydrator trays.

*Photo Above: Fruits drying in Excalibur Dehydrator: Strawberries, Apples, Grapes, Pears, Bananas, Pineapple, Mango. Juicy fruits with high sugar contents, like grapes, take the longest to dry.*

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Beans
Dehydrated canned beans rehydrate well on the trail, but dry beans cooked at home from scratch do not rehydrate well—they stay hard. So, I dry all kinds of canned beans to add variety to meals. The one downside of drying canned beans is that they split open when you dry them. They’re not pretty, but they taste good.

Photo Above: (l) Three kinds of beans on one Excalibur tray. (r) Vegetarian baked beans after blending. Bean bark rehydrates into a tasty sauce in backpacking meals.

Starches
The primary reason for precooking starches—pasta, potatoes, and rice—at home before drying is to save cooking time and fuel on the trail. You can still use macaroni straight from a box of Mac & Cheese in meals. As long as you maintain a boil for two minutes on the trail, followed by insulating the pot for ten to fifteen minutes, the macaroni will turn out fine. However, if you precook the macaroni—or any pasta—at home and then dehydrate it, all
you have to do when cooking on the trail is bring the meal to a boil, and then insulate the pot as usual.

Photo Above: (l) Precooked and dried macaroni. (r) Dried macaroni after rehydration in boiled water.

For potatoes, cut them into three-eighth-inch cubes or quarter-inch-thick slices before steaming and drying. You can also steam or bake potatoes whole and cut them after they cool. Sweet potatoes turn out great—nice and sweet—when baked whole and then diced. (Diced sweet potatoes shown below).
Cook rice in fat-free vegetable, chicken, or beef broth before drying it. That adds extra flavor to the meals on the trail.

*Photo Above, (l-r), dried rice that was precooked in vegetable, chicken, and beef broth.*

**Bark**

Another way to dry starchy foods like beans and potatoes is to liquefy them in a blender first. Spread the mixture thinly on dehydrator trays covered with nonstick sheets for Excalibur dehydrators or in fruit leather inserts for round dehydrators. Due to the starch content, the blended food dries with a cracked or puffy appearance. That’s why I called it bark. The wonderful benefit of bark is that you blend in extra flavors: cooked potatoes are blended with beef, chicken, or vegetable broth; canned beans are blended with barbeque sauce, enchilada sauce, or salsa. In trail meals, potato bark turns back into flavorful mashed potatoes. Bean bark dissolves into a delicious sauce that goes well with rice.
I make sweet potato bark by blending cooked sweet potatoes with apple juice and maple syrup. One of my favorite barks is pumpkin pie bark—a simple mixture of canned pumpkin, maple syrup, and pumpkin-pie spice. Sweet potato bark and pumpkin pie bark make delicious, chewy snacks, but they can also be turned back into mashed sweet potatoes or pumpkin-pie pudding with the addition of hot or cold water. They are also great for breakfast mixed in with oatmeal.

**Leather**

Similar to bark, leather is the end product of drying blended fruit. It’s not crumbly or brittle like bark; it’s pliable, like leather. My favorite fruit leather on the trail is applesauce because I can snack on it as it is, or I can rehydrate it back into applesauce with hot or cold water. To make applesauce leather, cook eight medium apples with one cup of apple juice, a pinch of salt, and cinnamon. Run the cooked apples through a blender and spread thinly on dehydrator trays.
Drying Instructions: 1) Spread blended fruit thinly on non-stick sheet over Excalibur tray. 2) When leather is close to dry, flip it over directly on a mesh sheet, and peel away the non-stick sheet. 3) Finish drying the leather without the non-stick sheet.

Photo Above: Strawberry leather dried @ 135° F (57° C).

Another type of leather that goes into many of my meals is tomato-sauce leather. If the tomato sauce has chunks of vegetables in it, run it through a blender first so that it dries evenly. Avoid using any sauce which contains cheese or cream, as that could spoil. Dry @ 135°F (57°C) for six to eight hours.

Photo Above: Tomato sauce leather torn into pieces.
Whole Meals

Most of the meals I eat on the Appalachian Trail are assembled from separately dried starches, meats, and vegetables. But a few, like chili and ratatouille, I cook as whole meals before drying them. Stews are good for drying as whole meals. To dry a whole meal, cut or break apart the meat and vegetables into uniform sizes to ensure that all parts of the meal dry thoroughly. Avoid drying meals which contain cheese or milk; those ingredients might spoil. *(Shown below: Rehydrated Beef & Bean Chili).*
Assembling Meals

Most meals include four basic components: a starch such as rice, pasta, or potatoes; meat or beans; vegetables; and a flavor or sauce ingredient. This ensures plenty of calories, protein, fiber, and nutrients – plus great taste in every bite. By drying the ingredients separately, you can use each ingredient, such as bell peppers, in many different recipes. Also, you can make several versions of a recipe by substituting different meats and vegetables. For example, starting with a base of macaroni and powdered cheese, you can make tuna mac with tuna and a medley of bell peppers, onions, mushrooms, and tomatoes, or you can make ham-and-cheese mac with ham and an assortment of peas, corn, carrots, and green beans. Add taco seasoning and substitute ground beef in the recipe to make taco mac and cheese. Meats and vegetables can be similarly mixed and matched with rice or potatoes as the starch base.

Portions

I ate regular-size portions, as shown in the sample recipes, during my first two long backpacking trips on the Appalachian Trail. I supplemented meals with extra servings of vegetables on the side, plus desserts. A regular-size portion consisted of one cup of dried food—or slightly more or less—which supplied about four hundred calories. Looking to increase calories and simplify meal preparation on the trail, I stopped cooking vegetables on the side and increased their quantity in the main meals. I also upped the
starch and meat in the meals. The large-size portions had fifty-percent more food with approximately 600 calories.

The large portions are very filling. Occasionally, I barely finish the meal, but most of the time I am glad to have a big meal. When Dominique and I hike together, we split one large portion for lunch and eat extra items on the side, like sliced cheddar cheese, tortillas, or bagels. For suppers, I sometimes prepare one large and one regular portion in the same pot because Dominique is not as hungry as me in the evening. Another option to consider when planning meal portions is to pack regular portions for lunch and large portions for supper. The best advice I can give is to experiment with the portions at home and decide what works best for you.

Photo Above: The assembled dried ingredients for a large serving of grated potatoes, peas and carrots, and ground beef.
Sample Recipes – Meals

Unstuffed Peppers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>1 Regular</th>
<th>1 Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ingredients:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dried Rice</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
<td>¾ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dried Ground Beef</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>⅓ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dried Bell Peppers</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>⅓ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tomato-Sauce Leather</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>⅓ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parmesan Cheese</td>
<td>2 Tbsp</td>
<td>3 Tbsp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Water to Rehydrate</td>
<td>1¼ Cups</td>
<td>1¾ Cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Approximate Calories</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**At Home:** Pack tomato sauce leather and parmesan cheese separately in small plastic bags. Enclose small bags with all ingredients in another plastic bag.

**On the Trail:** Combine all ingredients except parmesan cheese with water in pot and soak for five minutes. Light stove, bring to a boil, and cook for one minute. Remove pot from stove and insulate in a pot cozy for ten minutes. Add parmesan cheese before serving.
Photo Above: Unstuffed Peppers cooked on the trail.
Beef & Bean Chili

Servings: 3

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground beef, lean
- ½ cup breadcrumbs, fine
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 Tbsp. chili mix powder
- 1 15-oz. can dark red kidney beans, drained
- 1 6-oz. can tomato paste
- 1 15-oz. can diced tomatoes

Cooking Instructions:

Dice the onion, mince the garlic, open the cans, and drain the beans. Then pull the ball of breadcrumb-infused beef apart into small pieces so you can add it to the pot all at once.

Sautee onions in just enough cooking oil to coat the pan for five minutes. Add the garlic and sauté another two minutes. Add ground beef and cook until browned, about ten minutes.

Add chili powder to meat and cook another minute.

Add diced tomatoes, beans, and tomato paste.

Cook until bubbling, then reduce heat to low and simmer for one hour. If the chili gets too thick while cooking, add a little water.
Add more chili mix powder if you like it hotter; salt and pepper as needed.

Dehydrating Instructions:
Let chili cool before placing on dehydrator trays. Spread chili out on dehydrator trays covered with non-stick sheets.
Dry for 8 – 10 hours @ 145° F (63° C).

On the Trail:

1 Large Serving:

- 1½ cups Dried Chili (131 g)
- 1½ cups Water (414 ml)

Put chili and water in pot, and soak five minutes. Light stove, bring to a boil, and simmer for one minute. Remove from stove, insulate pot, and wait ten minutes.
# Chili Mac

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serving Size</th>
<th>1 Regular</th>
<th>1 Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ingredients:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macaroni</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
<td>¾ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Chili</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Bell Peppers</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Jalapeño Pepper</td>
<td>2 Slices</td>
<td>3 Slices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chili Powder</td>
<td>½ tsp</td>
<td>¾ tsp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt and Pepper</td>
<td>Pinch</td>
<td>Pinch +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water to Rehydrate</td>
<td>1½ Cups</td>
<td>2¼ Cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Calories</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**At Home:** Combine and pack all ingredients in a plastic bag.

**On the Trail:** Combine all ingredients with water in pot and soak for five minutes. Light stove, bring to a boil and cook for one minute if using precooked-and-dried macaroni, or boil for two minutes if using macaroni straight from the box. Remove pot from stove and insulate in a pot cozy for ten minutes.
Photo Above: Rehydrated Chili Mac
Mashed Potatoes with Meat and Vegetables

Serving Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Regular</th>
<th>1 Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato Bark</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
<td>¾ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Meat</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>⅓ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Vegetables</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>⅓ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt and Pepper</td>
<td>Pinch</td>
<td>Pinch +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water to Rehydrate</td>
<td>1¼ Cups</td>
<td>1¾ Cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Calories</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a very versatile recipe because any meat—ground beef or turkey, chicken, or ham—can be combined with any vegetable or medley of vegetables. One of my favorites is ham with mixed vegetables, but ground beef with broccoli is good too.

At Home: Make potato bark by blending two-and-a-half pounds of cooked potatoes with sixteen ounces of fat-free beef, chicken, or vegetable broth. Spread thinly on dehydrator trays and dry at 135° F until brittle. Pack all ingredients together in a plastic bag.

On the Trail: Combine all ingredients with water in pot and soak for five minutes. Light stove, bring to a boil, and cook for one minute. Remove pot from stove and insulate in a pot cozy for ten minutes. Stir vigorously to finish turning the potato bark into creamy mashed potatoes.
Mashed Potatoes with Chicken & Vegetables. Top: Rehydrated, Bottom: Assembled ingredients for large serving.
Bean-Bark Stew

Serving Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Regular</th>
<th>1 Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ingredients:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Rice</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
<td>¾ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Ground Beef</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried Vegetables</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bean Bark</td>
<td>¼ Cup</td>
<td>½ Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water to Rehydrate</td>
<td>1¼ Cups</td>
<td>1¾ Cups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Calories</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>602</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This meal also tastes great with dried ham substituted for ground beef.

**At Home:** Make bean bark by running a can of vegetarian baked beans through a blender. Spread thinly on dehydrator trays and dry at 135° F until crumbly.

Pack all ingredients together in a plastic bag.

**On the Trail:** Combine all ingredients with water in pot and soak for five minutes. Light stove, bring to a boil, and cook for one minute. Remove pot from stove and insulate in a pot cozy for ten minutes. The bean bark dissolves into a tasty sauce.
Photo Above: Bean Bark Stew rehydrated from assembled ingredients.
Desserts and Snacks

I used instant pudding for many desserts during my early hikes on the Appalachian Trail. Pudding was simple to make: mix powdered milk with cold water, stir in the pudding powder, and five minutes later the pudding was ready. I made the pudding a little healthier by adding dried banana or pineapple, which I warmed and rehydrated before stirring into the pudding.

For a healthier alternative to instant pudding, I also packed applesauce leather, sweet potato bark, and pumpkin-pie bark. I could eat those items as snacks, or I could rehydrate them with hot or cold water into creamy, all-natural pudding.

I pack two snacks for each morning and two for each afternoon, changing the assortment each day to keep it interesting. In addition to sweet potato and pumpkin-pie bark, I also carry M&M’s, goldfish crackers, pretzels, granola, all kinds of nuts, and dried fruit.

Dried fruit and pumpkin pie bark packed in snack-size bags.
Fruit Cocktail

Dried fruits—apple, pear, banana, mango, pineapple, peach—are a big part of the snack assortment. A half-cup serving of dried apples is equivalent to one-and-a-half small apples, but weighs only one ounce instead of half-a-pound. When I started carrying a thermos food jar, I switched from eating the fruit dry to eating it rehydrated as fruit cocktail, which is much better. After lunch, I add one cup of mixed, dried fruit to the thermos with two cups of cold water. Two hours later, when I need a late-afternoon boost, I open the thermos. Half the water gets absorbed by the fruit and the other half takes on a fruity flavor, which is wonderful to sip on hot days.

Photo Above: Assorted dried fruits rehydrated in Thermos with cold water. Note the fruity water surrounding the fruit.
Grahma Nanna Nilla Pudding

Serves 1

Ingredients:

- ½ Cup Dried Banana Slices
- ½ Cup Crumbled Graham Crackers
- 2 Tbsp Instant Dry Milk Powder
- 2 Tbsp Jell-O Brand Vanilla Instant Pudding Mix
- 1 Cup Water to prepare

At Home: Pack each ingredient in a separate small plastic bag. Enclose all bags in a larger Ziploc bag.

On the Trail: Combine dried bananas with half of the water in pot. Light stove and warm for ten minutes over low flame. There’s no need to boil—you just want the bananas to rehydrate and warm up.

Combine powdered milk with the other half of the cold water in a separate pot or cup and stir until mixed. NIDO® Instant Dry Whole Milk works well. Add instant pudding mix and stir briskly until smooth. Pudding will set in about five minutes.

Spoon out warm bananas over pudding. Top with crumbled graham crackers. Drizzle remaining banana juices on top.
Photo Above: Grahma Nanna Nilla Pudding
Pumpkin-Pie Bark

Serves 2-3

Ingredients:

- 1 15-Ounce Can Pumpkin
- ¼ Cup Real Maple Syrup
- 2 tsp Pumpkin-Pie Spice

At Home: Combine pumpkin with maple syrup and pumpkin-pie spice. Use real maple syrup for best results. Stir until ingredients are mixed well. You don't need to use a blender.

Spread thinly (about an eighth inch) on dehydrator trays covered with nonstick sheets or fruit leather inserts.

Dehydrate at 135° F for eight hours until brittle.

After about five hours, flip the bark over as follows: Place a spare dehydrator tray on top of the bark and flip the two trays over so that the bottom side of the bark is now facing up. This will ensure complete drying.

Yield: One-and-a-half cups of pumpkin-pie bark. Divide into half-cup or three-quarter-cup servings and pack in plastic bags.

On the Trail: Combine half a cup of pumpkin-pie bark with half a cup of hot or cold water. Stir until creamy. Increase bark and water to three-quarters of a cup for a larger serving.
Photo Above: Pumpkin, maple syrup, and pumpkin pie spice are all you need to make pumpkin pie bark or pudding.
Packing & Trail Cooking

Packing
As I dry the individual food ingredients for a trip, I store them in Ziploc bags or glass jars until I am ready to assemble the meals. It is not necessary to vacuum seal the food yet if the trip will be a short one—a week or two. For longer trips, or if starting to dry food well in advance of the trip, it makes sense to vacuum seal the individual ingredients. The best way to vacuum seal food at this stage is to put it in mason jars, which you seal with an inexpensive jar-sealing accessory that works with any FoodSaver brand vacuum sealer that has a canister-tube port. (Shown below). This saves money and reduces waste compared to using vacuum-seal bags. The jars can be sealed and resealed as you add or remove food. Go with the wide-mouth jars for easier access.
Once all the food is dried, assemble the meals in Ziploc bags, adding the dried ingredients called for in the recipes. Using a permanent-ink pen, write the name of the recipe and the amount of water needed to cook it on the outside of the bag.

*Photo Above: Individually dried foods ready to be assembled into thirty-one meals. See the Action Guide.*

After all the meals and snacks are assembled in Ziploc bags, I vacuum seal each day’s rations—breakfast, lunch, supper, and snacks—into its own vacuum-seal bag. Sometimes, with large portions or when I hike with Dominique, I have to use two vacuum-seal bags to contain a day’s rations. Before I seal the bag, I wrap each meal in a paper towel and label it with a pen. The
paper towel adds cushioning to help prevent the bag from losing its seal when sharp dried foods are scrunched under pressure.

Vacuum sealing is the best way to protect your food from moisture that could lead to mold growth. It ensures that any minimal amount of fat in the meals will not turn rancid from prolonged contact with oxygen. Plus, vacuum-seal bags are an extra layer of defense against gnawing mice.

Photo Above: Thirty-one dehydrated meals prior to vacuum sealing.
After the daily rations are vacuum sealed, I pack the number of days’ worth of food into a nylon food bag, which can be hung from trees or bear cables on the trail.

Photo Above: Two meals in one vacuum sealed bag. Notice that each meal inside the bag was wrapped in a paper towel.

**Mailing Food Ahead**

The benefit for section hikers of preparing food in advance and utilizing mail drops is that it saves the time of hitching or walking to a grocery store that may be many miles away from the trail. I would rather spend that time walking in the woods.

The Appalachian Trail has many places where you can mail food ahead and pick it up along your hike. I start each hike with four to eight days’ worth of food and mail the rest ahead. In most cases, I mail food to hostels where I plan to spend a night. Hotels also accept and hold mail drops if you plan to stay there, as do some small grocery stores that are close to the trail. You can mail
packages to any post office, but do that only when other options aren’t available. The problem with mailing to post offices is that they may be closed when you get there. The same is true for stores. If mailing to a post office, address the package as follows: Your Name, c/o General Delivery, City, State, and Zip Code. Also add Please hold for AT hiker. ETA (insert estimated date you expect to pick it up). Always check with an establishment before sending a package.

A good trail guide, such as David Miller’s The A.T. Guide, will list all the mail drop and resupply possibilities along the trail.

Order a current edition of The A.T. Guide
Trail Cooking

Cooking in a Pot

Combine ingredients and water in pot and soak for five minutes. Wait to add any milk or cheese powders until after the meal is cooked. Light stove and bring to a boil. Keep the lid on the pot. Continue boiling the meal for one minute. If the meal includes macaroni from the box that was not precooked and dried, boil for two minutes. This short amount of boiling softens the ingredients and speeds up rehydration. Remove pot from stove. Stir in milk or cheese powders if included in the meal. Insulate pot in a pot cozy with the lid on and wait ten to fifteen minutes.

Photo Above: Evernew titanium cooking pot with cooked and rehydrated meal that’s ready to eat.
Cooking in a Thermos Food Jar

For the first several hikes, I cooked hot lunches in a pot. Unfortunately, I sometimes skipped cooking lunch due to bad weather. I fixed that problem by carrying a thermos food jar, which made it easy and convenient to prepare lunch in advance.

After breakfast, boil more water and add it to the dried ingredients in the thermos. Use twenty-five percent more water than called for in the recipe, since the food will have more time to absorb the water. The hot lunch will be ready to eat whenever you feel like stopping. This cooking method also proves valuable when you expect to arrive at camp after dark. Prepare the meal on the trail while there is still light, so you can just open up the thermos and eat when you get to camp.
Cooking in a Freezer Bag
I don’t use this method, but a lot of people ask me if they can prepare dehydrated meals by adding boiled water to the ingredients in quart-size freezer bags. The reason given is that they don’t want to clean a pot. If cooking this way, it is essential to precook and dry any pasta that will be used in the meals. Otherwise the pasta will turn out undercooked. After adding boiled water to the ingredients in the freezer bag, place the bag in an insulating-pouch cozy to hold the heat in. Wait at least twenty to thirty minutes for the food to rehydrate.

Photo Above: Pot cozy on right.

Insulating Cozy
A cozy is made from lightweight reflectix® material (plastic bubble wrap with foil on both sides). It holds the heat in the pot while the meal finishes rehydrating.

See How to Make a Pot Cozy.
**Pots**

I use a 900 ml titanium pot when cooking for myself and a 1,300 ml titanium pot when Dominique and I hike together. The pots, made by Evernew, have frypan lids. I don’t fry anything in them, but they are useful to cook a side item or to use as a plate to serve the second person. Dominique and I have also used a GSI Dualist pot, which comes with nesting cups and bowls. That makes it easier for me to make coffee for Dominique in the morning.

*Photo Above: (l) 900 ml Evernew pot with fry pan lid, positioned over a tea light cup alcohol stove with wind screen. (r) 1,300 ml Evernew pot with fry pan lid, positioned over an Optimus Crux canister stove.*

See [Backpacking Cookware Reviews](#).

See [How to Make Tea Light Alcohol and Candle Stoves](#).
Photo Above: 1.4 liter GSI Dualist Pot comes with four insulated cups which makes the kit handy for serving two people.

**Stoves & Fuel**

Any stove and fuel system can be used to cook dehydrated meals. I cook meals when I hike alone using denatured alcohol, which I pour into an aluminum tea-light-candle cup. One candle cup holds half an ounce of alcohol, which is enough to bring a regular-portion meal to a boil for a minute or two. Large-portion meals require a partial refill of the cup. Denatured alcohol is available at most hostels along the Appalachian Trail, and is also sold at home-improvement stores. You cannot mail fuel through the postal service. When cooking for two, I cook with a small Optimus Crux stove, which screws onto a canister containing IsoPro™ fuel, an 80-20 mixture of isobutane and propane.
Resources

Recipes for Adventure
The Ultimate Guide to Dehydrating Food for the Trail.

Over 75 trail-proven backpacking recipes will have you cooking like an accomplished chef. Step-by-step instructions and full-color photos on every page. A scrumptious variety of light-weight options for meals, snacks and desserts.

Dehydrate fruits, vegetables, meats, scrambled eggs and more.

Learn how to make bark by drying starchy root vegetables, Chef Glenn’s innovative but simple technique for making flavorful and saucy backpacking meals.

Save money, too. Three or four homemade trail meals cost about the same as one freeze-dried meal.

Buy Recipes for Adventure

“This book changed the way I eat on the trail.” – John A.
Menu Planning & Food Drying Workbook
Estimate How Much Food to Dry for Your Trips

The Menu Planning & Food Drying Workbook provides printable worksheets and recipe cards that will help you review and customize recipes, plan a menu, and estimate how much food to purchase and dry for your trips.

A great planning tool to use with Recipes for Adventure!

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Start planning better meals for your next adventure.

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When you keep a supply of dehydrated meals on hand – for adventure, work, and travel – you’re automatically prepared for emergencies.

Based on recipes from *Recipes for Adventure*, the *Action Guide* shows how to make thirty-one meals with step-by-step instructions and photos on every page.

**Buy the Action Guide**

Be prepared with thirty-one meals for adventure, travel, work & emergencies.
1001 Miles on the Appalachian Trail
Chef Glenn’s Trail Journal

Reviews:

"Reading 1001 Miles on the Appalachian Trail makes me want to do something adventurous." - Erin

"Received your book yesterday and just finished. Congratulations on such a wonderfully written book. It is a beautiful love story between you, Dominique, and nature." - Annette

"Hi Chef. I read your book about the trail and really enjoyed it. I hiked from Springer to the roller coaster in 2015 with your recipes. Thanks!" - Denis

"Glenn’s eloquently written journal entries paint vivid pictures of the wildness of the AT, the fascinating variety of characters he met along the way, and the unexpected love story that unfolded between Georgia and West Virginia." - Lindsey

Buy 1001 Miles on the Appalachian Trail

“Well written, and a good read.” – Bridge Boy
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