WAR FOOD

DRYING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

This method of protracting the usefulness of the precious products of the earth is nothing new. Before the Christian era the sons of Ishmael dried dates and used them for the food of caravans toiling across the trackless deserts where there was no vegetation. They used the sun’s rays to extract the moisture from the fruit and this method has many advocates to-day. It is perfectly practical for the country housekeeper and also for the city dweller if she has access to a sunny roof. Otherwise the work can be done in a cool oven with the door always open, to prevent overheating and to let the moisture escape, for this is all that is to be accomplished, extracting the moisture; no particle of the aroma, flavor, or food value is lost if the work is done as directed.
Home-dried products are better than those done commercially because more attention can be given to details when doing a small amount, and they will find the same favor that is shown for home-made preserves. The process is no more difficult than that for canning and the dried food is more easily handled and stored. When once tried and the product used in the winter, this method of preserving will be in great favor with the knowing housekeeper who recognizes good things. Many prefer them to those that have been canned.

There is no fruit or vegetable that cannot be dried, although the methods differ somewhat. In every case they should be hurried into the sun or oven as soon as possible after preparing. The quicker they dry the better; this rapidity prevents decay and causes the color and the flavor of the fruit to be retained. It also has the advantage of converting a considerable quantity of starch into sugar, which in sweet fruits, such as peaches, is sometimes formed in such abundance as to
appear in small drops on the surface. On the other hand, if the fruit is dried in the oven, care must be used not to have the heat great enough at first to start the juice to flowing in the soft fruits or to harden the outside of the other fruits and vegetables, for if either of these things happens the moisture cannot escape from the interior.

For sun-drying a place should be chosen that has the sun most of the day. Supports can be put on the sunny side of a building and shelves or cheesecloth can be fastened across them.

If the lawn is to be used, simple frames can be made like the drawing on page 4. They should be driven into the ground three feet apart, and a yard of cheesecloth with loops of tape on the ends fastened over the nails on the lower connecting bar. When the fruit is drying, netting should be thrown over the frames to keep away flying insects. If there are ants about, soak the lower part of the stakes thoroughly in kerosene and there will be no trouble.
A SIMPLE FRAME FOR SUN-DRYING
These frames can be used with boards instead of cloth, for drying fruit that is so moist that it must be put on plates.

When drying by artificial heat, a little more care must be taken to keep the temperature even. The fruit or vegetable must be prepared as directed for that especial variety and spread on plates, which must not be of metal. At first it will be necessary to turn or stir them often so that they will dry evenly and not cake together.

A simple evaporator and one that is practical can be made, from a common bread box, by a tinsmith. Have a round hole cut in one end and a brown-bread or pudding mould the size to fit into the teakettle soldered into it. When this is set into the teakettle, the cover of the bread box should open out like a door. It must be tight so that no steam will reach the inside of the box; the heat that generates in the mould goes up through the fruit and escapes through the holes that are usually in the end of a bread box for ventilation. If there are none, have some made. With wire
shelves it makes an evaporator that will give uniform results, and requires very little watching.

Women who have been home-drying their garden produce have different methods of storing it so that it will not get damp and mould. Usually they put it in cheesecloth bags or old sugar sacks and hang it in a warm place for a few days; over the stove is convenient. The bags should be tossed twice a
day so that the product will dry evenly. After this finishing the vegetables are put into paper sacks and hung in any dry place where the mice cannot get at them. The attic seems to be a favorite storeroom, for there the bags can be hung from the rafters in safety.

If the work is done in a damp climate, more care must be taken to keep moisture away. Tin boxes and those made of pulp or manila paper coated with paraffin, are just the thing for storage; they can be sealed with adhesive tape or with paraffin and put in as dry a place as possible.

The individual recipes must be followed carefully, at the same time keeping in mind the general directions, and the results will be satisfactory.