

Dried Fruit

Our ancestors mainly dried fruit to preserve it for leaner times. Preserving foods by drying is very useful, convenient, inexpensive and requires very little storage space. There are many dried fruit products available; one could say that most fruits are also available in dried form.

Drying fruit basically involves preserving it by removing enough moisture from the food to prevent decay. Drying requires a method of heating the food to evaporate the moisture and to remove the water vapour formed. Our ancestors dried fruit at home, whereas in modern society we rarely dry fruit ourselves, we mainly make use of commercially dried fruit.

Most of the dried fruit we consume is dried by means of a machine such as a dehydrator. The drying process involves the selection of produce, the pre-treating the fruit and the drying process.

Enzymes in fruit are responsible for colour and flavour changes during ripening. These changes usually continue during drying and storage unless the produce is pre-treated to slow down enzyme activity. Fruits such as apples, peaches and pears tend to darken during drying and storage.

The most common ways of pre-treating fruit include, sulfuring, using salt solutions or ascorbic acid solutions and steam blanching. Commercially prepared dried fruit may contain added sulfur dioxide. With the drive to organic produce or products without additives, there are many dried fruit products without any added sulphur dioxide. Sulphur dioxide fixes the colour of the fruit during the pre-treatment process, hence the reason why organic dried fruit is often dark in colour. Some people claim that they can taste a difference, with the organic produce keeping much more characteristic flavours of the fresh fruit.

Dried fruits are typically high in fibre and complex carbohydrates and contain many of the minerals and vitamins necessary for vitality and life. Dried fruit are by no means inferior to fresh fruit.

Some interesting facts about dried fruit:

- It takes approximately 4 kg of fresh grapes to make 1 kg of sultanas. Similar proportions apply to other dried fruit, which is the reason why dried fruit often contains up to three times the amount of fibre found in fresh fruit.
- Dried fruit contains more calcium and fibre per 100 g than fresh fruit equivalents.
- Dried fruit is the concentrated version of fresh fruit, therefore portion sizes are smaller.
- Look out for dried fruit products that are not sweetened.
- Most dried fruits are an excellent source of fibre and can act as a natural laxative
- Most dried fruit contains a low Glycaemic Index.

Compared to other snacks – dried fruit is a healthy alternative and an easy way to include more fruit into the diet:

| Snack | Kcalories | Fat |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------|
| 50 g salted peanuts | 309 | 27 g |
| 50 g standard bar of milk chocolate | 255 | 14.8 g |
| 35 g standard bag of crisps | 180 | 10.5 g |
| 50 g standard cereal bar | 205 | 7.5 g |
| 42.5 g standard small box of raisins | 123 | 0.2 g |