

The Survival Mom *Dehydrated Dinners: Step by Step*

By Lisa Bedford

Did you know it's entirely possible to create dehydrated meals that require only hot water to prepare? Making dehydrated meals takes a bit of analysis, but once that step is finished, everything else is a piece of (dehydrated) cake! Follow these basic steps when converting a favorite recipe to a dehydrated version.

STEP ONE: *Can this recipe be converted to a Dehydrated Dinner?*

Not all recipes are convertible. The ideal recipe for conversion will be one whose ingredients are all available either as dehydrated or freeze dried. Often, these will be soups and one-pot meals.

If you're in love with a recipe that isn't easily convertible, combine as many dehydrated ingredients as possible and figure out how to keep the remaining ingredients in storage. For example, recipes that call for tortillas can usually be converted, but you'll need to have ingredients on hand to make the tortillas or be able to purchase them.

STEP TWO: *Convert each ingredient to its dehydrated version.*

Using a Dehydrated Dinners recipe worksheet, first list the ingredients as they appear on the original recipe. Then, write their dehydrated or freeze dried equivalences in the second column. Refer to the label on each can of dehydrated food or if you are using your own dehydrated foods, calculate this for yourself. NOTE: dehydrated and freeze dried measurements will be different.

STEP THREE: *How will it be packaged and stored?*

Unless your recipe is a soup, it may need to be packaged in more than one container. The type of recipe will determine if a single mylar bag or jar is enough, and certain recipes may require some ingredients be stored in a small zip-loc bag. The category of recipe can help determine how you will store your finished mix.

1) Casseroles and One Dish Dinners

This type of recipe usually does not include a large amount of liquid, such as water or broth. For that reason, when one of the ingredients is rice or pasta, those ingredients must be measured out and packaged separately since they must be cooked first before being combined with the other ingredients.

When a casserole recipe has a sauce or gravy mix that must first be prepared, either in a skillet or a saucepan, those ingredients should be separated in a zip-loc.

If your casserole recipe calls for dense dehydrated veggies such as broccoli or cauliflower, those larger, they might need to be rehydrated before being added to the casserole. Likewise, mushrooms will need to be rehydrated separately.

2) Soups

These will be the easiest recipes to convert and store, since all ingredients can be combined in one pot and the labels on your dehydrated foods will provide the equivalencies to fresh. One exception might be a creamy soup that requires a gravy/sauce mix to be prepared that might not contain enough water to rehydrate vegetables. In that case, separate the veggies from the soup base ingredients. A second exception is a soup containing beans. Beans need to be soaked and cooked separately before being added to the remaining soup ingredients.

3) Chili

If your chili recipe contains beans, those will need to be separated from the other ingredients. Once cooked, you can add them to the seasonings and water to complete the recipe. TVP or freeze dried meat can be included in the packaged mix, but store hamburger rocks separately (if using them) as well as canned meat.

4) Pasta Main Dish

Examples of these are Chili Mac and Skillet Lasagna. When assembling these recipes, separate the pasta in another jar or heavy duty zip-loc bag, since it will need to be cooked separately and then added to the remaining ingredients. If the recipe doesn't allow for plenty of water to rehydrate vegetables, they will need to be separated as well.

5) Dry Mixes

You may wish to create your own dry mixes for things like pizza dough, gravy mix and biscuits. Include an oxygen absorber. A desiccant pack will help insure that no moisture is in the sealed jar or bag.

STEP FOUR: Assemble your storage/packaging supplies and ingredients.

If you will be inserting an oxygen absorber in each jar or bag, have all your ingredients measured out into their containers before taking the final step of adding the oxygen absorber and sealing the can or jar.

A funnel may make it easier to pour ingredients.

STEP FIVE: Prepare one meal before sealing all the others.

This will give you a chance to test the recipe and adjust the seasonings, salt, and quantities of any ingredient before putting together and sealing the entire batch. It will also help you to complete the last step, writing out the cooking instructions.

STEP FIVE: *Write out cooking instructions.*

Before putting everything away, out of sight is out of mind, write instructions for cooking your Dehydrated Dinner. Include the procedure for rehydrating veggies, if done separately, cooking time for rice, beans or pasta, and cooking/baking times and temperatures. It might also be helpful to indicate the size of pot, pan, or baking dish, and if a fresh ingredient is required, such as meat or tortillas, make a note of that as well. You may be storing your mixes for a long period of time or giving them to others, so accuracy is important.

A convenient way to store your Dehydrated Dinners is to sort them by recipe into boxes or bins. They'll be protected from light and moisture. Be sure to label the outside of the box or bin with the name of the meal. A copy of the recipe, including instructions, can be placed inside the box, or you can print it out on labels and place them on the front of each bag or jar.