

Creating dehydrated vegetable packs is a great activity for organisations tackling food poverty or food waste in their cities. This factsheet covers the optimum temperatures, recipe ideas, and how to undertake this process with the help of volunteers.

## How to dehydrate food to reduce waste + support healthy diets

### INTRODUCTION

How do you tackle food waste and food poverty at the same time? **Dehydrated vegetables packs** aim to do exactly that, by ensuring that people receiving emergency food parcels have access to easy-to-cook vegetables with a long shelf life.

When prepared by the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, packs come as part of meal kit provided to those in food poverty, that includes the ingredients and recipe to make a simple and nutritious meal.



Photo: BHFP

### WHAT DO YOU NEED?

**Dehydrator** - a commercial dehydrator with as large a capacity as possible.

**Water meter** - it is essential that water measurement readings are taken after initial dehydration, before bulk packaging; and again before repacking into their individual distribution packs.

**Kitchen space** - you will require a lot of preparation space, as vegetables need to be chopped relatively small. Knives and chopping boards are also needed.

**Storage space** - surplus vegetables need to be stored, as well as space to store the packs. Space is essential!

**Volunteers** - volunteers to help chop, dehydrate + pack the vegetables.

**Packaging** - packs are stored in vacuum-sealed paper bags. A 'vac-pack' is recommended to ensure they are airtight. Packs should be resealable.

**Surplus vegetables** - using surplus vegetables helps reduce food waste.

**Recipe cards** - each kit has a printed, simple recipe, and an activity for families to do, such as a picture to colour in.



## HOW DOES IT WORK?

Surplus vegetables are used for dehydration. This is food that would otherwise go to waste, such as food gleaned from a harvest, or food that supermarkets have spare. Organisations such as Fareshare help distribute surplus food nationally, and locally. A dehydrator is used to dehydrate these surplus vegetables, which are then stored in vacuum sealed packs.

When the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership makes them, vegetable packs accompany a recipe kit containing simple ingredients to cook, providing easy-to-carry and easy-to-store vegetables that provide added nutrition to meals given out in emergency food settings. The kits are re-distributed at various food banks and food projects. As this is an initiative that targets food waste and food poverty, you may be able to find grants and funding for equipment such as a dehydrator.

1) **Conduct market research.** This is particularly important when working with people in food poverty settings, as you want to ensure that those receiving the parcels have the opportunity to influence what goes into them. Does something exist like this in your area? Have any community food projects done any research into what their service users like/dislike eating?

2) **Try out some recipe combinations** using the vegetables that you have available. As you are working with surplus donated food, you have to get used to being flexible, as well as getting used to working seasonal foods. Take these to different community cafes and emergency food providers in your area. Get people's feedback as to whether they like what they're eating.

3) If people like the taste of the food, the next step is to **get people to take the kits home with them** and try cooking the meals. This helps you find out whether your recipes are easy enough to follow and fun for people.

4) If you receive positive feedback on a flavour combination, then get ready to print out the recipe, and find an activity to go in the pack. Do you have links to the local food banks to distribute? Do you know how many people need them?





The whole process, from chopping, to dehydration, to storing takes around 2-3 days



Dehydrated vegetable packs can be made in community kitchens, food banks, or anywhere with a spacious, catering-standard kitchen



It can be helpful to have surplus food providers, food bank users and community food groups on board



Positive impacts include diverted food waste, increased nutrition for families in food poverty, and community building

## WHAT GOES IN THE PACK?

Preparing the vegetable packs can also be an opportunity to teach chopping skills to people with limited cooking skills.

Put a call-out in your networks for volunteers for 'chop and chat' sessions - sessions that are roughly 2 hours long, where volunteers can come together to chop, chat, and listen to music.

Volunteers also get the chance to learn about vegetables and new food combinations by taking part, so build in time to explain which vegetables you're using and what they taste good with. Use the sessions as a space to discuss potential flavour combinations, too.



### What's the optimum temperature for dehydrating vegetables?

A good rule of thumb is 8 hours at 65 degrees, but this can change depending on water content/texture. Get in touch using the contact info below to find out more.

## EXAMPLE RECIPE KIT

### BEAN AND ROOT VEGETABLE STEW

#### Ingredients:

Mediterranean Medley Vegetable Pack - contains dehydrated peppers, courgettes, garlic, onion  
1 tin of chopped tomatoes  
1 packet of pasta  
1 stock cube

You will need: kettle or saucepan for boiling water, one meal kit, medium or large saucepan, wooden spoon, a bit of vegetable oil and salt and pepper to taste

#### Method:

- 1) Heat the oil in a saucepan.
- 2) Boil the kettle, and cover veg in water, you don't need much (100ml). Wait for 5 minutes. Use a medium/large size saucepan to cook the pasta, add a little salt to the water.
- 3) Add the pasta, cook as long as is stated on the packet.
- 4) While the pasta is cooking, add tinned tomatoes, stock cube and the vegetable pack to a saucepan. Simmer for 5 minutes, or until the veggies are tender
- 5) Add salt & pepper to taste
- 6) Optional if desired - add chopped herbs, e.g. basil/parsley, grated cheese, or yoghurt

