

Citrus Fruit Preservation
 By Ora Emmerich
 UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers
 For Print February 4, 2011

My neighbor just rang the bell and delivered a bagful of wonderfully fresh Meyer's Lemons from her tree in the back yard. I could see that she still had several bags left to deliver. As I closed the door, the heavenly smell of the lemons began to fill my house and thoughts of what to do with all these bright yellow jewels began to fill my head!

Many people find themselves in a similar predicament this time of year, though the citrus fruit in question may be oranges, grapefruit or lemons. When the fruit ripens, it ripens all at once and the tree owners must preserve or share the bounty. Fortunately, preserving citrus requires only a little time and trouble. Most citrus fruits take well to freezing, but the sections must later be thawed completely for best taste. Dehydrating works well for preserving the fruit peel, and the dried peel adds delicious interest to cakes and other baked goods. Your favorite citrus juice recipe thaws into the best tasting treat.

To freeze your excess citrus fruit, start with firm, ripe fruit that has no soft spots. Wash the fruit well, and then peel the fruit. (If you plan to dehydrate the peel, cut it off in thin strips, leaving the white membrane behind.) Remove the membrane and seeds and pull or cut the fruit into sections. Pack the fruit into clean freezer-safe containers. Containers made of glass or plastic are fine, as long as the plastic types have been approved for use in a freezer. The fruit must be packed in cold, 40% syrup. To make the syrup, dissolve sugar in lukewarm water, mixing until the solution is clear. Chill syrup before using. The National Center for Home Food Preservation offers the following chart for concocting syrup used in freezing fruit:

Type of Syrup	Percent Syrup*	Cups of Sugar**	Cups of Water	Yield of Syrup in Cups
Very Light	10%	1/2	4	4 1/2 cups
Light	20%	1	4	4 3/4 cups
Medium	30%	1 3/4	4	5 cups
Heavy	40%	2 3/4	4	5 1/3 cups
Very Heavy	50%	4	4	6 cups

* Approximate

** In general, up to one-fourth of the sugar may be replaced by corn syrup or mild-flavored honey. A larger proportion of corn syrup may be used if a very bland, light-colored typed is selected.

Fill the container with syrup, pouring it over the fruit and leaving headspace. If you forget the headspace, your container will burst when the freezing liquid expands. If you use a pint container, leave ½ inch headspace for a container with a wide top opening, and ¾ inch headspace for one with a narrow top opening. Quart containers with a wide top opening require 1 inch headspace, and quart containers with a narrow top opening require 1 ½ inch headspace. Seal and freeze. Frozen citrus fruit stays in peak condition for 3-4 months.

Fruit juice from your recipe, pure juice, or juice with two tablespoons of sugar per quart, should be poured into clean glass containers to avoid off-tastes developing during freezing. Be sure to leave the headspace, following the suggestions for freezing fruit. Seal and freeze.

If you saved the fruit peel from the citrus fruit, dehydrating couldn't be easier. Set the dehydrator to 135° and dry until crisp. If you purchase fruit to dehydrate, do not use any fruit labeled "color added." Be sure to date and label your storage container. You can use any food-safe container that protects the food from air, light, moisture and insects. Store the dehydrated food in a cool (50° to 70° F), dark, dry place. Keep the dehydrated peel for up to a year, but check occasionally for moisture. If you find moisture, get rid of the food, do not eat it.

Enjoy the great citrus fruit available in abundance at this time of the year, and save some for later, too. If you have any further questions, call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will get back to you with an answer. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for your group. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including our free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at [http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master Food Preservers/](http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/).