

## What's For Dinner?- Part 4, by J.R.

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### Meats

While meat should probably be viewed as a nicety rather than an essential, we have made it an essential in this house. My husband is a type-1 diabetic, and as such his insulin will last a whole lot longer if he goes to a no-carbohydrate diet. We could purchase commercially-canned meats, but we really prefer not to for both economic and safety reasons. We buy pigs and sides of beef from a local family and generally use our meat straight from the freezer. However, we always keep a sufficient number of empty mason jars and new lids on hand for canning up all the meat, if the freezer dies or the power goes off indefinitely.

We also always have a good quantity of home-canned meats available. They are so convenient to use in making last-minute meals.

Beef, pork, and chicken are among the easiest items to can. Basically, you pack the raw meat into the jar, add salt, and process according to instructions. See your [Ball Blue Book](#) [1] for the step-by-step instructions.

There is, however, more to life than the basic three. Bacon is an essential in this house. I remember one autumn, after harvesting an abundant crop of potatoes, we were having baked potatoes very frequently for dinner. The kids were getting a little tired of them. So I fried up a jar of bacon to use as an additional topping. They were so grateful! And I was more than a little amazed at what a difference it made in them. It was another lesson learned about flavor fatigue.

I can both bacon ends and pieces and bacon strips. Bacon ends and pieces are sold in three- to five-pound packages, usually right next to the regular bacon strips. The packages will contain a lot of pieces of straight meat, a lot of straight fat, and a little that is a mixture of both. I usually can the meat in jars separate from jars of fat. While this fat is not what you would normally want to use for rendering into lard for baking, it is still very

valuable. I fry it up and pour off the grease to use later in making tortillas and pan frying a variety of foods. The cracklins are a pretty tasty topping for salads and baked potatoes. The meat is great for adding to soups and beans and for making bacon bits.

### **Canning Bacon**

Bacon strips take more work to can, but having those bacon strips once in a while for breakfast or for some BLTs will be greatly appreciated. You will need wide mouth pint jars [2] and a roll of parchment paper [3]. To prepare bacon strips for canning, first cut them to fit the height of the jar, minus one inch. Cut the parchment paper to the height of the jar plus one inch. Lay the bacon strips side by side down the middle of the parchment paper so that there is one inch of space on either side. Fold both sides of parchment paper over the ends of the bacon. Add more parchment paper as needed, trying to work it in to the preceding parchment and bacon strips to make a continuous roll. Roll it up as you would cinnamon rolls. Make the roll as large as possible while still allowing it to fit in the jar. Regardless of what kind of bacon you are canning, wipe the rims of the jars very carefully with vinegar on a paper towel. Do this at least twice to remove any traces of bacon grease or fat. Process per directions from your Ball Blue Book. Each pint jar will hold almost one pound of bacon.

In my earlier years, after reading that “you can can anything,” I decided to try canning hot dogs. After all, Beanie Weenies are a canned product, so I reasoned hot dogs should work as well. And besides they would be a huge treat for my children. So I bought the hot dogs—high quality hot dogs—and canned a few quarts. I don’t know what the problem was, but the result was truly nasty. The flavor was right, but the texture was horrendous. So I would have to advise against trying to can hot dogs.

### **Canned Hamburger Logs**

One experiment that did work was canning lean hamburger in the shape of small logs to be sliced later and used as hamburger patties. Like bacon strips, you need wide mouth pint jars and some parchment paper. Cut the parchment paper so that it is one inch wider than the height of the jars. Sprinkle ½ teaspoon of salt per pound of meat onto the hamburger and mix to distribute. Shape the raw hamburger into a log one inch shorter than the height of the jars, and just small enough to fit inside the jars. Place the hamburger on the parchment paper, fold in the ends, and roll up your hamburger log. Process per directions from the Ball Blue Book. When you are ready to have hamburgers, place your jar in hot water to soften the fat and remove the log from the jar more easily. Slice patties about ½-

inch thick and fry them briefly in bacon grease or butter. Serve with slider sized buns and all the condiments. While fresh hamburgers are always better, the kids all agreed that this would be a very welcome menu item in a TEOTWAWKI <sup>[4]</sup> situation.

### **Canned Cat Food “Bones”**

As most people know, chickens have hollow bones. What even most preppers don't realize is that chicken bones can be pressure canned (with water added to the right level in the jar). Pressure canning softens the bones such that even the largest can be easily mashed with a fork. The resulting chicken bone mash is a great food for cats. However, it is too high in protein for dogs. (Too much protein can cause kidney damage.)

### **Drying/dehydrated**

Probably the most desirable dried meat is jerky. We buy carne asada already very thinly sliced and salt both sides and pepper one side and then dry in the dehydrator. Raw chicken and raw pork should *not* be dehydrated.

The only other meat we regularly dry is what we call hamburger rocks. Basically, ground beef is thoroughly browned. The fat is then rinsed off very well. The cooked and rinsed hamburger is then spread on drying trays to dry. When reconstituted, the hamburger rocks are ready to add to casseroles and sauces.

### **Freeze-dried Meat**

While we do have some stored, we've never actually tried them. They have been too expensive for taste-testing. Once opened, the meat must be used within one month.

### **Smoking and Curing Meat**

I can't speak to these, as I have never done either one. They are on the list of skills to acquire!

### **Fruits**

Fruits were probably the first item I included in my expanded storage, probably because I have such fond memories of my grandmothers. One grandmother always had home-canned peaches and apricots for us. My other grandmother spoiled us with homemade fruit rolls and jams.

### **Canning Fruit**

You already know what's available from commercially-canned fruits at the store, and you know what you like, so I won't go into that. However, there are items that are not available

in stores that can be bottled at home. The first is bananas. The bananas are simply pureed or run through your juicer. Add a teaspoon of lemon juice per pint, pour into your canning jars, and process in your canner <sup>[5]</sup> for the appropriate amount of time for your elevation. Why can bananas? Canned bananas can be used in all kinds of homemade desserts and breads and also in smoothies. They add variety to the diet. Bear in mind that heat intensifies the banana flavor, so some don't like using canned bananas in smoothies. They work perfectly well for banana breads and cakes.

The second more unusual item that I can at home is pineapples. Home-canned pineapple does not have the same taste or texture (though it is quite acceptable) as its commercially-canned counterpart, but it does have one important advantage; it has a much longer shelf-life because it is preserved in glass <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **Drying Fruit**

As far as dried fruits go, we buy raisins and dried cranberries, but most other fruits are prohibitively expensive and/or entirely unavailable. Dried fruits are a highly desirable component of any food storage program for several reasons. Because most fruits are very high in water content, they lose a lot in weight and size when dehydrated, making the finished product very lightweight and portable. As a result, a whole lot of fruit, when dried, can fit into a canning jar or a small plastic bag.

Be aware that home-dried fruit is in most cases far different from commercially-dried fruit, which also generally has preservatives added. Furthermore, texture is everything with dried fruit. A fruit that is only mediocre when cut into chunks before drying becomes a huge treat when cut into long thin slices before drying. In addition, you must use quality fruit with good flavor, because while sugars will be concentrated in the drying process, the flavor itself will remain the same. So, before purchasing 50 pounds of watermelon to dry, make sure you and your family are going to like the result first.

**Watermelon-** When I first began drying, I read that fruits, like watermelon and pineapple, were cut into chunks. My dried watermelon chunks had a squash-like flavor to them. It definitely did not possess the candy-like flavor I desired to duplicate. So I tried again. This time I cut the watermelon into long, thin strips, like a fruit roll, about 1"x4", before drying. The result was perfection.

**Pineapple-** I had a similar experience with pineapple. While the dried chunks didn't taste like squash, the texture just wasn't all that desirable. So I also experimented with cutting

the pineapple into strips about the same size as the watermelon strips. This time the result was beyond perfection. Dried pineapple strips are a huge hit with my children, as they have been with the children of all my friends who have tried them. They must be carefully hidden away, or they will all disappear rapidly.

**Bananas-** Dried bananas are another popular item. Because we also prefer these to be as thin as possible, I put the slicing blade on the food processor and run them through.

**Strawberries-** While many people leave strawberries whole for drying, the texture is greatly improved if they are very thinly sliced so that they become strawberry chips.

**Fruit rolls-** However, when it comes to drying strawberries, most children far prefer the true fruit roll version for this fruit. To make fruit rolls, puree the strawberries in a blender. Add corn syrup ([Karo syrup](#) <sup>[7]</sup> does not contain HFCS) to taste. Pour the puree onto dehydrator trays that have been covered with plastic wrap. Spread the puree so that it is about 1/8" thick, and dry until only very slightly tacky. Once dry, I cut it with scissors into 3"x4" sections, roll those up, and store them in plastic. We also make fruit rolls with peaches, nectarines, and plums. (Do not use sugar as the sweetener, as this may result in a very grainy fruit roll. Honey may be used as the sweetener, but the result is that the fruit roll remains a little tacky and it can be difficult to gauge when it is sufficiently dry.)

All dried fruits and fruit rolls must be vacuum-sealed in either bags or canning jars in humid areas or they will take on moisture from the air. In a desert environment, vacuum sealing is not necessary.

### **Freeze-dried Fruit**

Freeze-dried fruits, though comparatively expensive, also have their place in a well-stocked pantry. Blueberries have been designated for our family's favorite blueberry sour cream pancakes with homemade blueberry syrup. Raspberries have been set aside for raspberry-lemon muffins. However, most of our freeze-dried fruit is intended for making various flavors of instant oatmeal. We combine 8 cups quick oats that have been processed in a blender or food processor for a few seconds, 1 cup dry milk powder, 1 cup sugar, and 2 to 2.5 cups freeze-dried fruit. (I so wish I could comment on using the Harvest Right in-home freeze dryer, but alas, it is still out of our range.)

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URLs in this post:

[1] Ball Blue Book:

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00Q5T4L4G/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B00Q5T4L4G&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=QFI4ZUPXCSCIUC4K](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00Q5T4L4G/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B00Q5T4L4G&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=QFI4ZUPXCSCIUC4K)

[2] wide mouth pint jars:

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000VDYUJI/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B000VDYUJI&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=MSY3WXSUYUXNNKUDO](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000VDYUJI/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B000VDYUJI&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=MSY3WXSUYUXNNKUDO)

[3] parchment paper:

[http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006JCWGIC/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006JCWGIC&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=KMD5BIUBTFQG3BJ4](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B006JCWGIC/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B006JCWGIC&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=KMD5BIUBTFQG3BJ4)

[4] TEOTWAWKI: <https://survivalblog.com/glossary/t/#TEOTWAWKI>

[5] canner: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0002808Z2/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0002808Z2&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=KQI6EJGFF4ISGKZ4](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B0002808Z2/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B0002808Z2&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=KQI6EJGFF4ISGKZ4)

[6] glass: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001DIZ1NO/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B001DIZ1NO&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=4QCK67RKQF3VNMHH](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001DIZ1NO/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B001DIZ1NO&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=4QCK67RKQF3VNMHH)

[7] Karo syrup: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004UEKLZ6/ref=as\\_li\\_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004UEKLZ6&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=QZOPRITQXM6KLXT4](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B004UEKLZ6/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B004UEKLZ6&linkCode=as2&tag=survivalcom-20&linkId=QZOPRITQXM6KLXT4)

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