

**Save the Strawberries**  
**By Ora Emmerich**  
**UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers**  
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Plump, juicy, red, ripe strawberries pop up at every roadside intersection to tempt passersby with tasty spring goodness. Who can resist stopping to buy a basket or three? With such an abundance of the delicious fruit available at this time of the year, smart consumers will find many ways to preserve the scrumptious berries.

Keep fresh strawberries in the refrigerator, in a partially opened plastic bag or in a plastic clamshell to keep the humidity level up. Store in the crisper drawer, and do not wash the fruit until just before eating. Washing will cause the berries to spoil faster because of the added moisture. The best way to wash strawberries is under cold, running water. While the temptation exits to fill the sink with water and soak the berries, resist it! Contaminants may be spread through the standing water to all the fruit, and the safest cleaning method remains rinsing under cold running water, perhaps with a soft rub on the surface of the strawberries while washing.

For the fruit that will not be eaten within seven days, the University of Davis Extension recommends several satisfactory methods of preservation. Strawberries may be frozen, dried or made into jams and jellies. Freezing strawberries, with or without a syrup pack, results in a product with good flavor but a “mushier” thawed result, although sweetening before freezing keeps the texture better than not.

Jams and jellies made with strawberries usually require the use of pectin. Although freezer jam requires no cooking, most jams and jellies combine cooked fruit with sugar and pectin to create a wonderful spread for toast or bagels. Strawberry jams and jellies may be safely processed in a water bath canner, following the times and temperatures on the recipe instructions.

Dried strawberries can be eaten out of hand as snacks, mixed into cereal or added to ice-creams and milkshakes. Completely dried berries can be crushed to a powder and added to “smoothie” drinks. Strawberries make wonderful fruit leathers and may be combined with other fruits for a variety of flavors. The University of Davis Extension recommends preheating strawberries to 160°F before using in a puree for fruit leathers. This destroys bacteria and mold that may be on the berries and preserves the color of the fruit while hastening drying.

To make fruit leathers at home, simply line a cookie sheet with plastic wrap. Puree the strawberries and pour onto the plastic wrap, spreading the puree to a thickness of 1/8-1/4 inch in the center of the mixture. Dry at 140° for up to 18 hours in the oven, about 4-8 hours in a dehydrator or for 1-2 days in the sun. If solar drying, be sure to keep insects and birds from infesting the fruit leather while it dries. When the leather peels easily from the plastic wrap and pressing in the middle does not leave a mark, the process is complete. Eat and enjoy the great taste of strawberries!

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. 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 small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including the 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/).