

Doggone Good Jerky

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For Mountain Democrat Publication August 3, 2022

Sometimes, when I'm cleaning my freezer, I find one or more packages of freezer-burned meat. In the past, my lips would quiver, and I'd become teary-eyed, at times on the verge of throwing myself on the floor, kneeling, pounding my fists screaming, "Nooo, not again! I've lost another to freezer burn." With a deep sense of loss, I'd slowly walk to the trash can, composed, holding my head high, and watch as the package of frozen meat left my hand and in slow motion fell into the trash can. Sadly, this was a too frequent occurrence, but things changed when I became a dog owner.

One day while reading the ingredients on a dog treat bag, I had an a-ha moment. Repurpose the freezer burned meat into jerky treats for my hound dog. I would know he was getting good quality treats. Who knows what all is in store-bought treats — especially the cheaper ones!

I first made fish teriyaki jerky but was unsure whether my Elvis would eat it. I was packaging the jerky when a friend stopped by to pick up a package. I went to fetch it and told him to take some jerky for his dogs. Well, he didn't hear the part about them being for his dogs.

By the time I returned he had eaten over half of the jerky. He said it was like nothing he had ever eaten, if it wasn't for self-restraint, he would have eaten the whole batch! I felt a paw tap my leg and found my dog looking up at me then look at my friend all sad-eyed.

Both my dog and friend loved the teriyaki fish jerky, and no, I did not have the heart to tell my friend the jerky was for dogs. It just goes to show the importance of proper labeling of preserved food.

Making safe doggone good jerky is easy!

If the dog jerky treats sound too good not to try, it is recommended that humans use only high-quality meats.

Here's a basic recipe for Fish Jerky based on the Pacific Northwest Extension's recommendations.

Ingredients:

Raw fish, any variety slightly frozen enough to be firm and easy to slice
Teriyaki sauce (store bought or homemade)

Steps:

1. Slice fish into thin strips.
2. Marinate fish in a glass or enameled pan with teriyaki sauce.
3. Place in the refrigerator for 12 hours. During this time the sodium in the sauce removes moisture from the fish making it denser and tender.
4. Remove from refrigerator. Let fish drain, then blot dry with clean paper towels.
6. Bake fish strips at 325°F to an internal temperature of 160°F for 1 ½ minutes. Length of time baked varies by thickness of strips.
8. While baking the fish, preheat the dehydrator to a temperature of 145 to 155°F. Arrange fish on drying tray, not overlapping, and dehydrate for a minimum of 4 hours. Jerky is done when texture is chewy and leathery.
9. Fish jerky must be refrigerated at 40°F or below.

It is disheartening to discover freezer burn. You can help prevent it by removing the air from the package so any evaporating moisture can't freeze in the air around the food.

For proper packaging of meats/fish/poultry that is in fresh condition, make sure you are using sanitary conditions. Generally, fatty meats and fish, cured meats and shellfish will retain their quality for 3 months in a 0°F or below. Lean meats, fish and poultry can usually be kept up to a year without an appreciable quality loss. Quality loss is gradual and meat and chicken stored for 18 months, or even two years, MAY be very acceptable. Fresh meats from the store need to be re-wrapped in an acceptable freezer wrap before freezing. Buying meat that is already frozen may be a better buy since it was rapidly frozen at the processing plant, thereby preserving the quality in the product. For best shelf life, you may want to double-wrap meats. By using two different types of wrapping materials, the moisture-vapor-proof barrier will be enhanced. Double wrapping also applies to bread or other baked products.

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your preserving questions. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmf@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program, events and recipes, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmf>. Sign up to receive our eNewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpcsenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!