

Understand the Differences between "Freeze dried" and "Dehydrated" food – be sure you're not paying freeze dried prices for dehydrated products.

Technically, all freeze dried food is dehydrated, but not all dehydrated food is freeze dried. However, the term "dehydrated" usually refers to processes where most of the water is removed naturally or by the application of heat. "Freeze dried" means the food is flash frozen and placed in a vacuum chamber and through a process called sublimation the ice is changed to a gas and removed.

Both types are important parts of a food storage program. Depending on the food, one method may be better than the other for preserving the food for storing long-term. Dehydration is the best method to reduce moisture for many types of foods, such as grains, legumes, baking mixes, and some fruits and vegetables, especially carrots. Because heat is involved, adding water doesn't necessarily return products to their original form and taste. The two main benefits of dehydrated food are that it generally costs less per ounce than freeze dried equivalents and more can fit into a can than if it were freeze dried, sometimes several times more, requiring less storage space.

On the other hand, freeze dried food retains much of its original size and shape with freeze-drying while dehydrating (heat or air dried) will cause the food to shrivel much like a raisin. Freeze dried foods rehydrate more quickly than most dehydrated foods. When rehydrated, freeze dried food is much like frozen food that has been thawed retaining most of its original appearance, taste, and nutritional value. Under the same conditions, freeze dried foods generally store longer than dehydrated foods. The downside of the freeze drying process is that it is more complicated, making the food more expensive. Most just-add-water meals, with the exception of Mountain House's freeze dried entrées, contain a mixture of dehydrated and freeze dried ingredients. When purchasing a year supply or other long-term combo, pay attention to how much is freeze dried and how much is dehydrated. Generally, the greater the percentage of freeze dried, the more expensive per net weight it will be.