

Freeze Fresh Produce in a Snap!

Freezing is a quick and easy way to preserve many fresh vegetables and fruits. And they are easy to include in all kinds of nutritious recipes because most of the preparation is done before freezing. Freezing also preserves nutrients — and is easier than canning. All you need is a good prep surface, a large pot for blanching, and freezer bags or containers.



- Rinse your produce. If you have items like carrots fresh from the farmers' field, scrub them gently with a brush. Do not soak produce in water.
- Prepare your produce. Cut off inedible parts like hard stalks and leaves and slice into bite sized pieces (if desired). Save discarded stalks, skins, and leaves to make vegetable broth. You can freeze that, too.
- Most fresh veggies want to be blanched before freezing. Blanching is simple. Heat a pot of water to boiling, throw the veggies in, boil for usually 2 minutes and remove.
- Drain well. A salad spinner works best for this. Some veggies like green beans freeze better if you let them dry before packing them. Spread them on a kitchen towel on the counter to dry.
- Pack into freezer bags or reusable plastic containers with airtight lids.
- Label and freeze. Burp bags and containers as air promotes oxidation and discoloration. A Sharpie pen and invisible tape make good labels. Don't try to freeze large quantities at once as this will slow the freezing process, cause ice crystals, and result in mushy produce.

Why blanch?

Blanching slows enzyme action. Enzymes are naturally occurring substances in plants that control the ripening process. Freezing only slows enzyme activity. Most frozen vegetables will lose quality in the freezer unless they have been blanched. Blanching also

- Improves flavor, color, texture, and nutrient retention
- Slows or stops the action of enzymes in the ripening process
- Cleanses the surface of dirt and organisms
- Brightens the color of green vegetables
- Wilts or softens vegetables, making it easier to fill containers

Freezing does not kill most microorganisms in food, but it does prevent their growth if the food is held at 0°F (-17°C) or lower. When thawed, the surviving organisms can grow again.

Blanching Time Chart

- Asparagus, small spears: 2 minutes
- Asparagus, large spears: 4 minutes
- Green, wax, or Italian beans, small: 2 minutes; large: 3 minutes
- Broccoli, 1½-inch (4 cm) pieces: 3 minutes
- Brussels sprouts, small heads: 3 minutes; large heads: 5 minutes
- Cabbage, quarters: 4 minutes; wedges: 2 minutes; shredded: 1½ minutes
- Carrots, sliced or diced: 2 minutes; whole: 5 minutes
- Cauliflower, small pieces: 3 minutes; large pieces: 5 minutes
- Corn, whole cut kernel or cream style: 4 minutes
- Corn on the cob, small ears: 7 minutes; medium ears: 9 minutes; large ears: 11 minutes
- Okra, small pods: 3 minutes; large pods: 5 minutes
- Peas, black-eyed and green, small: 1½ minutes; large: 2½ minutes
- Sugar peas, small: 2 minutes; large: 3 minutes
- Zucchini or summer squash, ½-inch (13 mm) slices: 3 minutes
- Chopped onions and peppers usually don't need blanching.

Herbs

Freezing is also an easy way to preserve herbs like basil, cilantro, sage, or parsley. To freeze recipe-sized portion, chop and blend the herbs with olive oil and freeze in ice cube trays. Store the frozen cubes in freezer bags and they'll be ready to pop in your favorite dishes.



More tips!

- **Summer squash** gets soft in the freezer but still works wonders as an a secret vegetable weapon in all sorts of recipes including quick breads.
- To freeze **winter squash**, bake the whole squash in the oven until soft, usually about an hour at 350 degrees. Cool, slice, and peel. Freeze the flesh in freezer bags.
- **Collards, kale, and mustard greens** get very soft when frozen but still make great additions to soups, sauces, casseroles, and meat loaves.
- **Beets!** Rinse, cut off the tops and root pieces. Put a tablespoon of olive or vegetable oil in a crock pot. Layer beets, lightly spray each layer with more vegetable oil. Cook until tender, about 3 hours on high. Cool and place in freezer bags. Save peeling them for later!
- To freeze **strawberries**, rinse, cut off tops, let dry, and place in one layer on a baking sheet. Freeze, place in freezer bags, and put back in the freezer. This method works for **raspberries** and **blackberries**, too.
- Freeze **blueberries** right out of the box or bag. Rinse them when you use them. Drop frozen blueberries directly onto pancakes or blend into smoothies for a



Oven-roasted tomatoes for the freezer!

Did your Granny put up jars upon jars of canned tomatoes every summer? We'd all love to continue that tradition but it's not always practical. By oven roasting and then freezing tomatoes, you can still have plenty of tomatoes for your favorite sauces, soups, and chilis. You can even heat them and use them directly on pasta or homemade pizza.

- Slice tomatoes thinly. Toss with olive oil. Add chopped basil, cilantro, or garlic if desired.
- Arrange in one layer on a baking sheet.
- Bake at 350 for about 1 hour or until caramelized.



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