



Brrr.... Freezing

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Sometimes it seems a waste to use the home freezer. Must be cold enough outside, right? Well, read on for the low down on the use of low temperatures to preserve food.

The easiest way to preserve food at home, freezing requires little skill and few tools. Most family kitchens contain a refrigerator/freezer unit for keeping foods from spoiling quickly. To utilize the freezer properly, check to see that the temperature control keeps the contents at 0°F or below. Freezing prevents the bacteria in foods from reproducing and renders these bacteria dormant. However, thawing the food allows the bacteria to begin spreading again, so keep frozen foods frozen until ready to use.

Fruits and vegetables freeze easily, but require a bit of preparation to maintain the quality of the food. Most vegetables should be blanched before being packaged for the freezer. To blanch means to plunge the vegetables into boiling water and to maintain the boil for a specific amount of time before cooling the blanched food rapidly in ice water. This action stops the enzymes responsible for color and flavor changes and loss of nutrients in the vegetables. Check out the website at the National Center for Home Food Preservation for blanching tables and other useful information at <http://nchfp.uga.edu>.

Fruits usually do not require blanching, but some preparation becomes necessary to prevent browning. Simple commercial mixtures of ascorbic acid (vitamin C) available anywhere home canning supplies are sold help to prevent the enzyme action of the fruits which causes browning. Directions on the package can be followed easily.

Meat and meat products do not require blanching or ascorbic acid. These foods must, however, be packaged to prevent exposure to air, which can cause the fat in meat to develop a rancid, or off, taste. In fact, all food that goes into the freezer should be packaged to keep out as much air as possible.

Special plastic bags or containers labeled for freezer use prove invaluable to the home food preserver. The items help to reduce the amount of air in contact with the food. Package the food as stated in the directions, but always remember that freezing food will expand, so be sure to leave headspace (or a little extra room), especially with rigid containers. Remove as much air as possible before freezing, and seal the food entirely within the packaging.

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.