

## For a Fresh Taste of Summer Year Round Try Freezing Garden Produce

MADISON, Wis.—Would you like to enjoy bright, crisp garden green beans all year long?



How about ripe juicy strawberries? Freezing fruits and vegetables can be an easy way to enjoy the bounty of your garden and orchard all year round. Compared with other methods of food preservation, freezing saves time and nutrients, and keeps fruits and vegetables fresh-tasting and colorful. The ease of using frozen food in family meals adds to their appeal, and your local UW-Extension office can provide instructions and recipes for preserving fruits and vegetables this summer.

One advantage of freezing is that fruits and vegetables can, and should, be harvested at peak quality. So, start with ripe, juicy strawberries or tender, crisp green beans. Ideally you should freeze produce the day that it is harvested.

Once prepared, place food to be frozen in containers or freezer bags that seal tightly and keep moisture in and air out. Sturdy plastic containers, plastic freezer bags, and aluminum foil or waxed freezer paper can be used for wrapping products. Be sure to seal all packages or containers. Label packages clearly with the date and a description of the food item, and freeze immediately. Plan to freeze only limited amounts of food, two to three cubic feet of food, for best quality.

University of Wisconsin-Extension offers the following recommendations:

**Freezing fruits.** Wash all fruits in running water, handling delicate fruits carefully, and drain thoroughly. For the best quality, treat fruits before freezing to preserve their color and texture.

-- Antioxidants such as vitamin C prevent browning of light-colored fruits. Prepare a dip of 500 mg vitamin C per quart of water as a dip for sliced apples, apricots, peaches and pears. Drain, and package for freezing.

-- Freezing fruits in dry sugar or sugar syrup helps to retain color and texture. A medium syrup can be prepared by dissolving three cups of sugar in four cups of water. Pour fruit into a freezer container; add the syrup, allowing enough headspace for expansion, and freeze. Sugar isn't necessary for freezing any fruit. Blueberries, cranberries, currants, rhubarb and gooseberries all freeze well without sweetening. If you plan to make jam or jelly later, be sure to freeze fruits without sugar.

Package treated fruits in appropriate containers, label, date and freeze for up to one year.

**Freezing vegetables.** Most vegetables that can be frozen require a short heat treatment known as blanching to stabilize their color, flavor, and texture, and also to preserve nutrients. Wash all vegetables to be frozen, and peel, seed or slice as directed. Blanch using steam or boiling water. Place vegetables in, or over, boiling water, making sure the water continues to boil. Cover and start counting the blanching time—the exact time varies with the type of vegetable. Once blanching is completed, immediately plunge the heated vegetables in an ice-water bath to cool. Too much blanching and the vegetables will appear over-cooked. A good rule of thumb is to cool for the same amount of time as you blanch.

Too much time chilling may lead to a loss of nutrients. For instance, if you blanch carrot slices for two minutes, then cool them in ice water for two minutes. Drain cooled vegetables and place them into freezer bags or containers. Label and date the bags and store for up to one year in the freezer.

Remember that not all vegetables freeze well. Those that do not freeze well include green onions (scallions), lettuce and other salad greens, radishes and tomatoes (except for cooking). Peppers (green, red, pimento and hot) do not require blanching. Simply wash, seed and slice the peppers. Dry, if necessary, and place them in a freezer bag or container with a label and date.

A complete guide to Freezing Fruits and Vegetables (B3278) is available from UW-Extension as part of the Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation Series by Barbara Ingham. Available from your county UW-Extension office or from Cooperative Extension Publications (877-947-7827) and online at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu>.

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**Frozen strawberries.** Sort berries and wash gently. Drain well. For an unsweetened loose pack, place on trays in a single layer, freeze for 1 to 2 hours, then pack in freezer bags and return to the freezer. For sugar pack, sprinkle sugar on berries and gently mix until sugar is dissolved. Slice strawberries or crush other berries and mix with sugar. Pack in freezer containers. Syrup pack may be used; leave 1-inch headspace.

### **Creamy Strawberry Ice Cream**

3 cups heavy cream  
4 cups whole milk  
1-1/2 cups instant nonfat dry milk  
1-1/2 cups sugar  
1 Tbsp gelatin dissolved in 1/2-cup hot water  
1 Tbsp vanilla  
1 pound frozen strawberries, crushed or sliced, unsugared

Pour cream and milk into a large mixing bowl. Add nonfat milk powder and sugar while stirring constantly. Add dissolved gelatin and vanilla. Pour into ice cream freezer and chill thoroughly, 6 hours or overnight. Chilling the mix beforehand results in a higher quality product. Remove from the refrigerator and stir well to distribute the gelatin and sugar. Freeze according to manufacturer's directions. As ice cream begins to thicken, add strawberries and continue to crank ice cream churn until ice cream hardens. Serve with fresh strawberries, if desired. Yield: 1 gallon.

### **Refreshing Frozen Fruit Salad**

1 sm. Strawberry Jell-O (3 ounces)  
1 c. Water; boiling  
6 oz. Pink lemonade concentrate  
8 oz. Cool Whip; thawed  
16 oz. Frozen Peach slices  
3/4 c. Seedless green grapes  
1/4 c. Frozen strawberries, sliced  
2 Bananas; sliced 1" thick

In large bowl, dissolve Jell-O in boiling water; add lemonade concentrate and stir until melted. Chill until slightly thickened, about 45 minutes. Blend in whipped topping; fold in fruit. Pour into 9x5 loaf pan. Freeze about 4 hours or until firm. To serve, unmold. Garnish with additional fruit if desired.

**Frozen green beans.** Select young tender beans. Sort and snip ends. Wash. Leave whole, cut into uniform lengths or slice lengthwise into strips for French style. Blanch for 3 minutes. Cool, drain and package for the freezer.

**Freezer pickles.** For some reason, cucumber and other vegetable slices packed in vinegar and sugar before freezing will remain crisp. Pack freezer pickles in rigid plastic containers, freezer bags or wide-mouth canning jars. Label, date and store in the freezer at 0° F or colder for up to 6 months. Freezer pickles are best chilled, so serve them right from the refrigerator once thawed.

Here is a favorite recipe from *Homemade Pickles and Relishes (B2267)*, part of the Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation Series from UW-Extension:

### **Freezer Dill Slices**

8 cups pickling cucumbers, thinly sliced (2-1/2 pounds)  
1 cup sweet red pepper, seeded, cored and chopped

Pickling solution:

3 tbsp canning and pickling salt  
4 garlic cloves, peeled and minced  
1/3 cup dill weed, minced  
1 tsp dill seed  
1-1/2 cups sugar  
1-1/2 cups cider vinegar (5% acetic acid)

1. Gently wash cucumbers, slice 1/16-inch from each end and discard. Thinly slice cucumbers and measure out 8 cups. In a large bowl, toss the cucumbers with the salt. Let the cucumbers stand 2 hours, and then drain.
2. In another bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients. Pour the mixture over the cucumbers, and stir well. Refrigerate the mixture for 8 to 10 hours.
3. Pack the cucumber slices and pickling solution in freezer bags or rigid containers, label and date, and freeze at 0° F or colder for up to 6 months.
4. Thaw pickles for about 8 hours in the refrigerator before serving.

Yield: 4 pints

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