

WHAT TO KNOW WHEN MAKING FREEZER MEALS

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FREEZEABLE FOODS

“You can freeze almost anything, but that doesn’t mean that you should”.

- Cream sauces should not be frozen because they separate.
- Other foods that do not freeze well are potato salad, macaroni salad and fried foods, according to the Oregon State University Extension Service.
- And, while raw eggs in the shell should not be frozen, they can out of the shell. The raw eggs can be beaten slightly or separated into whites and yolks and stored up to a year in tightly sealed freezer containers, according to the American Egg Board. Because egg yolks thicken, the board recommends adding 1/8 teaspoon of salt or 1-1/2 teaspoons of sugar per ¼ cup of egg yolks (about four large eggs). Yolk with salt can be used in savory dishes while the sugared yolks work well in desserts.

FREEZING TIME

For the sake of quality, use a freezer meal within three or four months.

RAW VERSUS COOKED MEAT

Both raw and cooked meat can be frozen. However, because meat loses moisture during cooking, its quality will diminish quickly when frozen compared to raw meat.

HOW TO FREEZE

- Lay the filled, sealed freezer bags flat on a baking sheet in the freezer with air around them to speed up freezing time. When the bags are frozen solid, stack them upright like books. “A two-inch bag of food should freeze solid in two hours.”
- Stacked bags will take longer to freeze allowing ice crystals to form.
- Casseroles can be frozen in a glass dish and then popped out and rewrapped in quality plastic wrap and foil for storage in the freezer. It then can be returned to the original glass dish for thawing and cooking.

EQUIPMENT

- “You don’t have to have a lot of expensive equipment to freeze foods”.
- Use quality freezer bags, a permanent marker and stickers for labeling the bag and listing reheating instructions, quality plastic wrap and foil for casseroles, an ice cube tray to freeze small items and glass or foil pans.
- “If I’m cooking meatloaf, I go with foil pans so that I don’t have to worry about messy cleanup”.
- Expressing air from freezer bags is effective enough usually to keep a freezer meal safe from the ice crystals that form when air is trapped inside the bag.
- A freezer bag stand also is handy for keeping a bag upright while filling it with food.
- Avid freezer meal cooks may want to invest in a good food chopper to make quick work of onions and other diced vegetables and a vacuum sealer if buying large quantities of meat to repackage into smaller portions.

THAWING

- Frozen meals can be thawed in the microwave, the refrigerator starting the night before, or cold water that is changed every twenty minutes.
- Frozen meat and other meals should not be thawed on the countertop. “Freezing does not kill bacteria. It stops it. The bacteria will continue to grow when thawed.”