



July 2017

The BigFreeze

Whether piled high at a local farm stand or pouring in from your garden, fresh produce is plentiful, ripe and ready to eat. But what if your family won't (or can't) eat an entire bushel of beans at one sitting? You can't let them (the beans) go to waste.

Freezing fresh fruits and vegetables keeps flavor and nutrients intact. It's cheaper and easier than canning too. Yet you still need to know a thing or two about the effect of very cold temperatures on the summer harvest.

The first rule is "Don't freeze vegetables that are usually eaten raw." For instance, green beans freeze well while lettuce or cucumbers collapse into green slime.

Keep in mind fresh-picked vegetables are not inert; they have active enzymes working in them. The enzymes are busy turning natural sugars into starch. Over time, this process transforms that just-picked sweet flavor to the flat flavor of cardboard. Blanching will neutralize these enzymes. Blanching involves cooking vegetables briefly in boiling water so they stay crisp and slightly underdone. For most vegetables, it's good practice to blanch before freezing.

Fruit does not need to be blanched, although blanching will make it easier to remove peach skins. Spread whole berries or pitted, sliced fruits on a parchment-lined baking sheet and freeze. Once frozen solid, transfer to plastic bags.

Easy-to-freeze summer vegetables

Asparagus
 Broccoli
 Carrots
 Cauliflower
 Corn
 Collard, mustard and other sturdy greens
 Green and waxbeans
 Lima beans, butter beans and edamame
 Okra
 Peas (English, snow peas and sugarsnaps)
 Tomatoes*

Zucchini and yellow squash – small, firm squash are best
 * Dunk tomatoes in boiling water for 10 seconds. Remove skins. Freeze whole or chopped.

QuickTakes



Fresh Picks for Summer

Fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet. And it's so easy to put these nutritious foods on your plate in the summertime. Choice is huge, flavor is at its peak and price is often at the lowest.

It's hard to dispute the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables:

- They add vitamins, minerals and beneficial plant chemicals to your diet.
- They help reduce the risk for heart disease, stroke and some cancers.
- Nearly all fruits and veggies are low in calories and provide fiber, which helps with healthy weight management.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 recommend a daily target of 2½ cups vegetables and 2 cups fruit per day for adults at the 2,000-calorie level.

This month's newsletter explains how to freeze summer's fruit and vegetable bounty to enjoy the rest of the year.

Here's your step-by-step guide to blanching and freezing your summer vegetable harvest:

- Step 1** Select slightly underripe vegetables for freezing. If you're harvesting straight from the garden, pick veggies in the morning, before they warm up in the sun. If you're picking at a U-pick farm, don't let your harvest sit for hours in a hot car.
- Step 2** In the kitchen, line up everything you need: a large pot for the blanching, a slotted spoon or skimmer to remove veggies from the pot, plastic bags or other freezer-safe containers, a Sharpie marker for dating the bags, a sink full of ice cold water and a vacuum sealer if you have one.
- Step 3** Wash, peel (if necessary) and trim veggies. Cut into even size pieces if needed.
- Step 4** Plunge prepped veggies into boiling water. Cook for 1 minute once the water returns to a boil. Skim veggies from the pot. Plunge them into cold water to cool quickly. Remove and pat dry.
- Step 5** Pack into containers. Compress bags or use a vacuum sealer to remove as much air as possible. Date and label contents. Freeze. Frozen vegetables retain their flavor and texture for several months.

Sources: National Center for Home Food Preservation, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. "Preserving Food: Freezing Vegetables," undated.

USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service. "Freezing and Food Safety," 2013.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. "2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans," 8th Edition, 2015.

Peach-Blueberry Cobbler

There's a cupful of fruit in every serving of this easy summer dessert.

INGREDIENTS

For the fruit filling:

4 cups sliced peaches (fresh or frozen)
2 cups blueberries or blackberries (fresh or frozen)
1/3 cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon flour pinch of cinnamon

For the topping:

1/2 cup cornmeal, preferably stone-ground
1/2 cup self-rising flour
2 tablespoons butter
1/2 cup low-fat or nonfat buttermilk

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. In a 2-quart baking dish, toss together fruit filling ingredients.
3. In a bowl, combine cornmeal and self-rising flour. Cut in butter with a fork or your fingertips. Working quickly, add buttermilk and stir until the dough just comes together. Drop the dough by spoonfuls onto the fruit filling.
4. Bake the cobbler until the fruit is bubbling and the cornmeal topping has browned, about 20 minutes.



NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

170 Calories
7 g Fat
2 g Saturated fat
3 g Protein
28 g Carbohydrate
3 g Dietary fiber
103 mg Sodium