

Waste Not, Want Not... Freezing

A few years ago, I was road tripping and as I traveled, I listened to a radio station where the host was discussing the amount of food Americans waste each year. He was wondering when it is really necessary to discard food. I couldn't resist and I called in and spent 20 minutes talking about extending the life of food, expiration dates and how to avoid waste.

If you are like so many the realities of health care costs, un or under employment, pandemics and civil unrest are on your mind and the reality of a situation requiring us to stay at home is no longer an unrealistic possibility. Many are looking for more ways to tighten their belts and still be prepared to stay safely at home. For example, never throw away leftovers, no matter how small, freeze them and add to stews, casseroles and soups. With this in mind let's take a look at freezing foods. You may be surprised just how many foods are safe to freeze.

1. **Milk:** Milk may be frozen in its original container. Remove one cup of milk per gallon before freezing to allow for expansion if freezing in a plastic milk jug. I recommend freezing milk that comes in a carton instead. Plastic bottles can split in the freezer. If using a carton you do not need to remove any milk before freezing. Thaw in the fridge placing the container in a bowl just in case the container has cracked during freezing, it can happen. Defrosting will take a day. For a quicker defrost place container in a bowl in the sink for 6-8 hours. Shake well before using.
2. **Cream cheese:** Leave in original packaging and freeze. Defrost on counter or in fridge and whip occasionally to keep it from separating. Will not be great for spreading but great for recipes.
3. **Sour cream:** Leave in original unopened packaging or for leftovers after a party place in freezer bag and freeze flat on cookie sheet. Remove extra air and stack. Defrost in fridge and whip occasionally to keep it from separating
4. **Whipping cream:** Whip cream will break and will be unable to be whipped. Use for sauces or ganache.
5. **Yogurt:** Freeze in container that is free of extra air. Makes a great treat frozen. Scrape with a knife to make a creamy dessert. Whip well to avoid separating when defrosting. Great for use in smoothies.
6. **Cheese:** Wrap tightly in plastic wrap or vacuum seal. If cheese is vacuum sealed when you purchase just freeze in original wrapping. Cheese will crumble when defrosted so it is best used as an ingredient or for grilled cheese.
7. **Eggs:** Beat together egg yolks and whites as you would for scrambled eggs, pour into ice cube trays. Two cubes are equivalent of one large egg. You can also separate eggs and store yolks and whites separately. Pop eggs from the ice cube tray and place in freezer bags or to store for more than a few months vacuum seal.
8. **Tomatoes:** Wash and freeze whole on a cookie sheet. Once frozen transfer to freezer bags or vacuum seal for longer storage.
9. **Tomato paste:** Have part of the can left over? Place two tablespoons in an ice cube tray and freeze. When frozen, pop out and place in a freezer bag.

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10. Zucchini: Shred and store in vacuum sealed bag for use in cakes and breads.
11. Squash: For hard squash such as butternut, wash and chop to desired size, then blanch for 1 minutes. Cool, freeze in freezer bag or vacuum sealed bag.
12. Pumpkin: Treat as a squash.
13. Celery: Wash and chop to desired size. Place on cookie sheet and freeze. Remove frozen celery and store in freezer bag or vacuum seal. Frozen celery will be limp and is good for soups, stews and casseroles.
14. Peppers: Wash and chop to desired size. Place on cookie sheet and freeze. Remove frozen peppers and store in freezer bag or vacuum seal. Frozen peppers will be limp and are good for soups, stews and casseroles.
15. Onions: Wash and chop to desired size. Place on cookie sheet and freeze. Remove frozen onions and store in freezer bag or vacuum seal. Onions will be limp and are good for soups, stews and casseroles.
16. Ginger: Ginger will keep in the freezer for up to 3 months. Peel and slice into 1-inch pieces, wrap in plastic wrap or place in a freezer bag. Ginger may also be frozen whole. To use simply grate into recipes.
17. Garlic: Place in freezer bag and freeze.
18. Avocado: Peel and remove seed. Brush with lemon or lime juice and freeze in freezer bag or vacuum seal for longer storage. Avocado can also be mashed and placed in a freezer bag which can then be pressed to lay flat for easy stacking. Defrost and use in guacamole.
19. Fresh Herbs: Wash and dry herbs. Place on cookie sheet and freeze. Vacuum seal. OR Chop and place in an ice cube tray along with a small amount of water. To use add frozen cubes directly into hot foods.
20. Bananas: Freeze in peel. Thaw and peel to use in smoothies and breads. Peel will turn black but banana will be fine.
21. Citrus: Squeeze fruit and place juice in ice cube trays, after cubes are frozen transfer to freezer bags. Cubes will last 6 months or vacuum seal for indefinite storage. To freeze the zest, place on cookie sheet and freeze. Once frozen transfer zest to a freezer bag. If you have room you may also freeze whole fruits to defrost and juice later.
22. Apples: Freeze whole or chopped, peeled or unpeeled. Apples will be soft when defrosted so they are best used for pies, applesauce, muffins and breads.
23. Peaches: Freeze whole, defrost for a half hour, slip off peel and slice or dice to use. Peaches may also be peeled sliced and frozen by placing on a cookie sheet, freezing. Once frozen vacuum seal or for the short-term place in freezer bag.
24. Cranberries: Stem, wash, drain and dry. Place in freezer bag or container with no air space. For store bought just freeze in original bag.
25. Rhubarb: Wash, dry and trim into 1-2 inch pieces. Place in freezer bag and freeze or vacuum seal for longer storage.
26. Mango: Cut in chunks, dry and freeze on cookie sheet. Transfer frozen fruit to freezer bag or vacuum seal.
27. Strawberries: Do not wash. Rub with paper towel and place on cookie sheet, freeze and transfer to freezer bag or vacuum seal.
28. Gravy: Left over gravy is great to freeze and use later as a base for a casserole or when you are out of time to make a gravy from scratch. Freeze left over Thanksgiving gravy to use with

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- leftover turkey. Place in freezer bag, lay flat on cookie sheet and freeze. When frozen squeeze out any remaining air and stack in freezer.
29. Chicken broth: Why waste all that great broth after boiling a chicken? Place in freezer bag, lay flat on cookie sheet and freeze. When frozen squeeze out any remaining air and lay flat to store.
 30. Cake mixes: Remove inner packaging from box and place in freezer. Be sure to store directions with your mix. I use packing tape to attach directions before freezing.
 31. Pasta: Pasta freezes well in casseroles or slightly under cooked and ready for a quick meal. Cook to al dente, drain, dry and place on cookie sheet. Freeze and remove to freezer bag.
 32. Cooked Rice: Cool cooked rice and freeze in freezer or vacuum bags. Again, slightly under cooked works best. To use heat in microwave until fluffy.
 33. Potatoes: We know about tater tots, but you can also freeze left over mashed potatoes from those holiday dinners. Just reheat and you are good to go! Potato chunks do not freeze well.
 34. Soup: Place in freezer bag, lay on cookie sheet and freeze. When frozen remove any remaining air and reseal. Cream soups do not freeze well.
 35. Nuts: Store nuts shelled or unshelled, in freezer bags. Nuts do not need to be vacuumed sealed.
 36. Chocolate: This is a great time to snap up holiday candies on sale. Chocolate and chocolate with nuts freeze well. Soft centered candies or those with a cookie center do not freeze well. If you notice a white film on the chocolate when you defrost, don't worry. A white film is not mold and is simply a change in the structure of the fats in the chocolate. Perfectly fine to eat and very yummy.
 37. Cookies: Don't want to eat all those cookies? Freeze some in a freezer bag to enjoy later.
 38. Cookie dough: Make cookie dough balls and place on a cookie sheet to quick freeze. Remove from sheet and place in freezer bag or for longer storage vacuum seal. Defrost on cookie sheet and bake as usual.
 39. Cake: Need cakes for a special occasion? Bake cakes, allow to cool, wrap in foil, and freeze. Frozen cakes are also easier to frost.
 40. Pie: Assemble pie as you normally would. Place plastic wrap over pie, add foil and freeze. You can also purchase disposable metal containers that will fit in a vacuum sealer bag, place filling in pan, freeze and once frozen vacuum seal, pan and all. This works well for a crisp.
 41. Pie filling: Assemble fruit pie filling adding sugar and spices as usual. Place in freezer bag and lay flat on cookie sheet until frozen.
 42. Canned fruit: Why freeze canned fruits? Many families prefer to eat fresh but canned fruits are a must in a great food storage plan. When the need to rotate becomes a priority drain fruits and place on lined cookie sheet. Freeze, place in freezer bags and use in smoothies or defrost and mash for amazing fruit sauces for pancakes and waffles, just like apple sauce, only better.
 43. Crisp topping: Assemble your favorite crisp topping and freeze in freezer bag or vacuum seal. When needed just crumble over fruit mixture and bake.
 44. Quick bread: Breads such as pumpkin, banana, lemon, etc. freeze well. Make ahead for the holidays. Wrap in foil and freeze. Do not wrap until breads are completely cooled.
 45. Bread: Take advantage of those sales. Bread will store well in the original packaging for up to three months.
 46. Bread dough: If your roll recipe makes enough for the whole block roll the extra dough into roll size pieces. Freeze on a cookie sheet and then remove and store in a freezer bag. The same

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is true for yeast items such as cinnamon rolls. Cut cinnamon rolls, lay flat on a cookie sheet, freeze, remove and store in freezer bag. When ready to bake remove just what you need, defrost and bake as usual. For yeast doughs allow time for the dough to rise.

47. Casseroles: Look thru the list of foods that freeze well and include those in your recipes. For example, I freeze chicken pot-pie but I do not add potatoes as they do not defrost well. Mix all ingredients, place in freezer bag and freeze flat on a cookie sheet. When ready to use defrost, place in casserole dish and bake as usual.
48. Cooked meats: Freeze leftover meats. Cut into cubes for use in soups and casseroles, leave in larger piece or slice for sandwiches. Cooked meats are best stored vacuum sealed but if they are to be used in a few weeks place in freezer bag.
49. Applesauce: Going out of town or just too much, freeze it. Place in freezer bag, lay flat on cookie sheet and when frozen, stack.
50. Hummus: Add a very thin layer of olive oil to the top of hummus that has been placed in an airtight container, seal and freeze. Thaw in the fridge for a day and mix thoroughly.
51. Pesto: Placed in an airtight container, freezer bag, or vacuum bag, seal and freeze. Thaw in the fridge for a day and mix thoroughly.
52. Butter: I think we all know this but, just in case.
53. Flours: Freezing flours helps kill any eggs which may remain from processing. Freeze in original packaging if using within a few months. Freeze a week to kill weevil eggs.

Additional tips:

- Never freeze anything in a metal can.
- When freezing on cookie sheet place silicon sheet or freezer paper on cookie sheet and then add foods for easy removal. Foods can stick to a cookie sheet making them more difficult to remove.
- You will note I have often mentioned freezing on a cookie sheet. This method will make stacking frozen foods easy and save valuable space.
- All these food will defrost quickly so never store them on the door. Storing in the back or center of the freezer is best.
- When freezing never place foil directly on food, except quick breads, always place plastic wrap on first, then add foil.

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