

Keep Your Cool - Freeze Foods At Home

By: Melissa Piper

With the increased interest and need for gardening this season, many people will no doubt be trying some form of food preservation to keep all the produce they have gathered. One of the most efficient, safest and quickest methods is freezing.

"Freezing food is the simplest method of food preservation," was the comment of Mrs. Alletta Schadler, Home Economist for Lebanon County who conducted a food freezing class this week at the Municipal Building.

"There is a minimum of steps in freezing foods - because they usually go from the garden to the container to the freezer."

Mrs. Schadler went on to explain that food spoilage does not occur as readily in freezing foods as it does when canning because a vacuum situation does not occur. Freezing fruits, vegetables and meats either inhibits the growth of bacteria and enzymes or kills its growth because of the low temperatures. Thus, there is not as much chance for spoilage to occur as in the canning process.

Upright or Chest

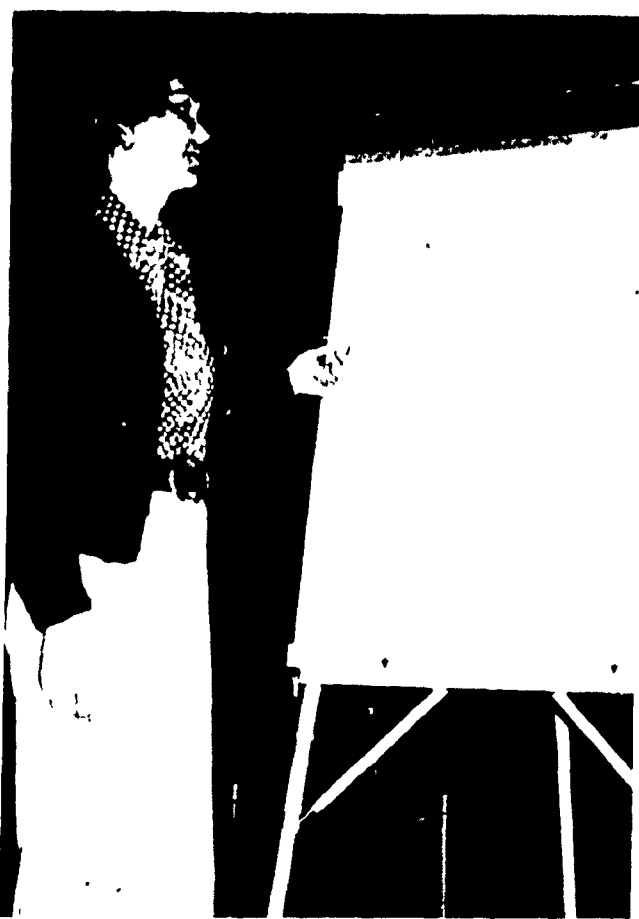
The type of freezer that you have or buy depends greatly on individual needs and the space that is available. A chest type freezer is more convenient where larger bulky packages are to be stored whereas the upright freezer is quite helpful where space is a problem.

Freezers as opposed to freezer storage chests in refrigerators are more efficient for storing food as the temperature stays relatively the same usually at 0 degrees or below. The freezer compartments in refrigerators are not as dependable as they sometimes have migrating temperatures which can range from 0-32 degrees Fahrenheit.

Chest type freezers do allow for the retention of cold longer as not as much cold air can escape when the door is open. For when an upright freezer door is opened the cold air has a tendency to fall out quickly.

One main caution Mrs. Schadler told her audience is to be cautious of slamming the door on upright freezers. Many doors on such types have the tendency to bounce open slightly when slammed close. Many times people do not realize this can occur and the contents of the freezer defrosts without the knowledge of owner. One way to curb this from happening is to lock the freezer door after entry however, this is not advised in cases where children are present.

When buying a freezer there are several rules of thumb which are important to remember: One of the main aspects is to look at all the features of the freezer. There are several different types of defrosting freezers with several methods involved. There are also different interior finishes. Some models have quick frost shelves which have specially engineered shelves for extra coldness. Buyers are also cautioned to look at the storage compartments for suitability of the food which will be in the freezer



Alletta Schadler, Extension Home Economist for Lebanon County, gave some interesting insights to freezing food at home during a clinic held Tuesday morning.

and for any insurance that may be included with the appliance.

As in buying any other appliance the freezer should be able to meet the needs of the person purchasing it. Amounts of food, space and preference is important facts to consider.

Rules for Success

And what about freezing the food itself?

There are a number of different rules that can make freezing safe and simple. Mrs. Schadler shared the following with her audience. Always begin with high quality food as freezing will not improve the quality. Freeze food promptly after buying or picking it before it can lose color and freshness. Blanch vegetables to halt the maturing process and package properly for storage. Try to store the frozen food at zero degrees or colder and avoid refreezing when possible.

There are many different types of containers that are suitable for freezing including plastic containers with lids, plastic bags, freezer wrap and heavy duty foil.

While an individual can choose any one of these, it must be remembered that any container should be airtight, moisture proof, leak proof, odor proof and vapor proof.

If plastic containers are used, they should have tight fitting lids to prevent moisture getting in. While plastic bags are good to freeze in, the heavier the plastic the better as heavier plastic resists punctures. Bags should always be closed air tight either with a "twisty tie" or a rubber band.

When the regular freezer paper is used, the plastic coated side is always placed next to the food. Adhesive especially made for freezing should be used to secure it properly.

Foil can be used, "Mrs. Schadler noted," but it should be heavy duty as the regular foil can rip and tear

in the freezer.

Other methods which were suggested included freezing in tempered glass jars and coffee cans lined with plastic freezing bags. Also margarine containers with tight fitting lids can be employed.

One important aspect to remember when freezing is that the exclusion of air is the key to success. Also leave headroom for expansion and label the packages with the date and description of the product.

Freezing Fruit

While canning fruit has been the accepted practice for many years, freezing is also a way to preserve summer favorites. Fruit can be canned with a sirup, plain or sugared according to the preference of the person involved.

When planning to freeze fruit, the ripest should be selected. Clean and prepare the fruit either by slicing, dicing or leaving whole. Package the fruit in containers with sirup or plain and freeze quickly. For most fruits that are to be frozen with a sirup - a 40 percent sirup is advised.

The recommended amount of sirup is usually given at 1/2 - 2/3 cup of sirup to a pint of fruit. To make a 40 percent sirup solution combine 3 cups of sugar to 4 cups of water.

Mrs. Schadler noted that sugar substitutes are not to be added to fruit which is frozen, substitutes often have the tendency to bitter during the freezing process. It is best in that case to freeze the fruit plain and add the substitute before eating.

Fruits which have the tendency to turn dark should be treated with either lemon juice or ascorbic acid. Placing the fruit in lemon juice will preserve the color. When sirup is added, the ascorbic acid is usually added to the sirup.

Hold the Lettuce

Freezing vegetables is also a quick preservation method. Most vegetables can be frozen quite well except for the green leafy varieties

such as lettuce, celery and spinach.

Steps to freezing are much the same as the fruit in that the vegetables should be cleaned and prepared, blanched to halt the maturing process and then plunged in an ice bath to stop the cooking. Packaging and freezing is the same as for fruits.

Blanching is done to halt the maturity of growth in the vegetables. This is accomplished by placing the vegetables in a wire basket and holding them in boiling water for the amount of time required (lists are available from the extension service and cookbooks.) To stop the cooking process the vegetables are then placed in ice water for the same or longer period of time as they were blanched. Steaming is also a process to stop the maturity and is accomplished by placing the vegetables in a large kettle of boiling water and allowing the steam to penetrate the produce. The vegetables are not placed directly in the water in this step but held about 1-2 inches above the boiling water.

It is important to thoroughly cool the vegetables before placing them in the freezer as it takes more time to freeze warmer produce. When this occurs, it causes the vegetables or fruits to become mushy when thawed.

For the proper steaming and blanching times, consult a cookbook or material especially prepared for freezing. Each vegetable has a different time which should be followed to insure quality.

Stuffed Poultry

a No-No

Meats, fish and poultry can also be frozen quite successfully if done in the proper manner. Meats should be divided into small portions and frozen as soon as possible. Large portions such as halves of beef and pork should be blast frozen at a locker plant, if possible, to insure quality. A large



Many types of containers can be used for freezing. Mrs. Schadler demonstrates the use of boxes to an interested audience at the recently held clinic on home freezing.

amount of meat placed in a freezer all the same time will hinder the freezing process making the meat lose much of its natural juices when thawed.

Stuffed poultry done at home should not be frozen as the stuffing offers a good medium for the growth of bacteria. If commercial poultry is bought, it is good to cook without thawing so that bacteria cannot grow in the warm environment.

Freezing salted or cured meats is not advisable since flavor changes can occur. Hotdogs are one meat which do not freeze particularly well as the spices added to them can often change flavors.

Frozen meats should not be kept for long periods of time but should be used as

soon as possible. Frozen meats which have been defrosted should be cooked before refreezing takes place.

While freezing is quite efficient for many products there are some exceptions to the rule. Food such as mayonnaise, crisp vegetables, gelatin mixtures and whole bananas should not be frozen, although personal preference is always the standard to use.

Freezing food is quick and for the most part quite safe if done in the proper manner. As in any food preservation method, however care should be exercised at all times. So when the produce starts rolling in from the garden, keep your cool and freeze that food!

Milk Is Lacking In Diets

One of the problems with American diets in general is the lack of milk and milk products, says a University of Maryland Extension home economist.

"Milk is a nearly complete food, and by far the best known food source of calcium," according to Mrs. Mardelle K. Amstutz, program specialist working with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service.

"Twenty-four-hour food recalls by our EFNEP families show that many people in Maryland follow the national trend in their eating habits. Of all the Basic Four food groups, milk usually fares worst," Mrs. Amstutz points out.

"It is not because people don't know the value of milk. Almost any school child can tell you that milk supplies calcium, and calcium is needed to grow strong bones and teeth. But many adults forget that calcium in bones needs to be replaced regularly," she says.

Adults who do not drink enough milk tend to develop porous bones. These bones become brittle and break easily. Lack of calcium in the diet is one reason that broken bones heal so slowly in elderly people, she explains.

Nutritionists have determined that adults need two cups of milk (or its equivalent) every day; children need three cups and teen-agers need at least four.

Maryland's EFNEP aides, working with low-income families, report that many of their clients do not get enough milk in their diets. These families say they do not like milk - or have trouble digesting it. This may be a problem called lactose intolerance that appears to be more prevalent among people in certain races than in others, Mrs. Amstutz says. This undigestibility problem can be overcome by relying on cooked or fermented milk products such as custards, cream soups, puddings, cheese and yogurt.

Plain yogurt compares

favorably in nutritive value with ice cream because yogurt is made from whole or skim milk and has less butterfat and sugar. If sweetened fruit is added to yogurt, the calories are increased.

In whatever form you use milk, it is still the best known source of calcium, she points out. You can get some calcium from dark, leafy vegetables, but you have to eat large amounts to get as much as is contained in one cupful of milk. Canned salmon and tuna are good sources of calcium - if you eat the bones. But for a constant supply, you can't beat milk.

Calcium is needed for much more than strong bones and teeth. It also helps to regulate the heartbeat and other muscle functions, and it aids in blood clotting.

In addition, milk is high in riboflavin, a B vitamin which helps to maintain healthy skin, and protein, which is essential for rebuilding and replacing body tissues.