

Ladies Have You Heard?

By Doris Thomas
Lancaster Extension
Home Economist



MICROWAVE OVEN SPEEDS DEFROSTING

Quick and efficient defrosting of frozen foods is one of the big pluses of a microwave oven. All ovens on the market today have a special defrost setting, but the power level assigned to this setting may vary anywhere from 70 percent of full power to 30 percent.

If the defrost setting on your oven is higher than 50 percent, you may find you get better results with a lower setting. Lower power levels also reduce the amount of attention needed during defrosting.

At lower power levels, the oven cycles on and off. During the "off"

periods the heat has time to equalize. At the higher power levels, the outside of the food may start to cook before the inside defrosts.

The final quality of the food you serve from your freezer depends on two factors. The first is good freezer management. Food should be packaged properly, kept at a constant 0° F. temperature, and should not be stored beyond the recommended time for that particular food. The second factor is the attention you give the food during the defrosting process.

In general, porous, low moisture foods such as breads and pastries defrost quickly and evenly. They

need little attention. Dense foods such as meats, seafoods, poultry and frozen casserole dishes are a little more complicated. The following tips may help simplify the process:

Cover meats with wax paper. It will hold the warmth around the food as it begins to defrost.

If the meat has been frozen in its grocery store wrapper, remove the styrofoam tray as soon as possible in the defrosting process. The tray insulates the bottom of the meat like an ice chest. Even the paper liner used to absorb meat juices will draw microwave energy away from the meat and should be removed.

If you are defrosting poultry in a plastic bag, be sure to slit the bag and pour off any liquid as it accumulates. The liquid absorbs energy and slows defrosting.

Foods frozen in glass containers don't have to be removed from the container before defrosting. Just pop the food in, container and all.

If you have an older oven without a defrost cycle you can still use the oven to defrost. Set the timer on the microwave allowing two minutes per pound of food. Rotate the item a ¼ turn and turn the food

over halfway through the estimated defrosting time. At the end of the defrosting time rest the food 20 minutes to allow heat to transfer to the center. Test center. If food is still frozen, re-set the timer allowing 1 minute per pound of food. Rotate ¼ turn halfway through the defrosting time. Rest 15 minutes. Test center. If the food is still frozen, repeat until the center is thawed.

FREEZING MIXED VEGETABLES

Packaged mixed frozen vegetables in supermarkets come in a variety of combinations, and those with broccoli and cauliflower generally command the highest price. These vegetable combinations are not only pleasing to the eye but appeal to the tastes of many families. So, it's not surprising that many home freezer owners want to freeze their own vegetable combinations.

It's easy to do. The essential ingredient for individually quick freezing vegetables at home, sometimes called tray freezing, is

patience. Following are some general directions:

1. Decide on the mix. Most commercially frozen products combine 3 to 4 different vegetables.

2. Prepare vegetables for freezing.

3. Cut, slice or dice vegetables into appropriate sized pieces.

4. Blanch, chill and drain.

5. Spread vegetables on a tray making sure pieces do not touch one another.

6. Place tray in rapid freeze section of the freezer. If pieces are small, vegetables will freeze in 1 to 2 hours.

7. Package and label mixed vegetables. Store at 9° or lower in home freezer.

This method is also excellent for freezing onion and pepper discs, rings or strips. Store in large freezer bags or other resealable containers. Remove only the number of items you need for casseroles and other dishes. Reseal bags and return to the freezer immediately.

Seed some fall vegetables now

LEESPORT — Now is the time to reseed the areas from which you harvested your early peas, onions, and beets, says James J. McKeen, Delaware County Extension Agricultural Agent.

Vegetables in the cabbage family such as brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, and regular cabbage produce better quality crops when they mature in the cooler fall weather and are ideal for seeding in this empty space.

Growing plants to transplant stage does not take much garden room if you start the seed in a "nursery." This means sowing the seed rather thickly in rows about 10 inches apart. Seeds in a packet of broccoli or cauliflower can easily fit into as row 10 to 15 feet long. The seeds should be spaced about 1½ inches apart in the row.

When the seedlings are 4 to 6 inches tall they should be transplanted to the empty area in your garden and spaced according to

directions on the seed packet. Before transplanting, be sure the plants are thoroughly soaked.

Soil should be well prepared and after setting the plants apply a little "starter" solution at the base of each plant. The "starter" can be purchased in most garden stores. It will be labeled as 100% soluble fertilizer. It usually has a ratio of 15-15-15 or 20-20-20. After the plants are well established, a sidedressing of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 fertilizer should be applied between the rows.

Keep a watchful eye for invasions by devastating insects advises McKeen, late crops must be kept moist because they will not be productive unless they have a continuing supply of water. Brussels sprouts will continue to produce nice buds right up to late fall during most. Broccoli, cauliflower and Chinese cabbage will withstand light frosts and some cabbage varieties will survive a heavy freeze.

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