



How To Package Food For Microwave Defrosting
Your freezer and your microwave make a terrific combination to give you quick meals in a hurry. Food defrosts faster in a microwave than on a counter, but I'll bet you've noticed it doesn't defrost evenly. Remember that package of hamburger — frozen in the middle and cooked around the edges?

Food defrosts unevenly in a microwave because ice does not absorb microwave power. Most of the microwaves pass right through the ice or frozen food, just as they pass through a glass or plastic container.

Then, once small areas of the food thaw, they start absorbing all the microwave energy, and these spots heat up too fast. This is why you get hot cooked areas, right next to icy spots when you defrost the food quickly.

So what can you do? Here are some tips for packaging your food to help it defrost evenly.

Packaging

1. Package food to be frozen in rounded flat "pancake" shapes,

with no corners. Up to an inch thick is best. Two inches is ok if you have a large quantity.

2. Even better than a pancake shape is a "doughnut" shape with a hole in the middle. This shape lets microwaves enter the food from the center as well as the edges, helping the middle thaw evenly.

Always use a doughnut shape for freezing ground meat: For an individual hamburger patty, press a finger dent in the middle to make a thinner spot. For larger quantities, make big flat round patties. Then press your thumb or fist in the center to make a hole or thinner spot.

3. Make a doughnut shape in a casserole that would otherwise be a big thick block of food. Press an empty paper or plastic cup into the middle of the food before freezing.

Frozen Dinner Plates

If you make your own frozen dinners from leftovers, how you position the food on the plate is important.

1. Slice the meat thinly and lay it out evenly in a ring around the

edge of half of the plate. It will heat more evenly if covered with a thin layer of gravy or juice.

2. Spread potatoes or rice, etc. in a flat curved shape around the other half of the plate. Make a "well" and fill with gravy, butter, etc. as desired.

3. In the center of the plate, put vegetables or any other foods which heat more quickly.

4. If you have unevenly shaped food, like broccoli spears or drumsticks, arrange these as you would for cooking: Put the thicker or tougher stem parts to the outside, and the tenderer or thinner parts near the middle of the plate.

5. Leave a 1/2-inch space between food on the plate to give the microwaves room to "get in."

6. When possible, put frozen dinners in the refrigerator to start thawing early in the day you plan to have them. The less ice in the food when you start microwaving, the more evenly the dinner will heat.

Make this easy Chicken Casserole and freeze it for some unexpectedly busy day! Then watch for the Micro Way next week for defrosting tips and more delicious freezer meals!

- Chicken and Broccoli Casserole**
2 cups uncooked noodles
1 10-ounce package frozen chopped broccoli
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
2 tablespoons flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 cup milk
1/4 cup shredded Cheddar cheese, divided
2 cups cubed cooked chicken

1. Cook noodles conventionally while you prepare rest of casserole.

2. Remove waxed paper wrapping from package of broccoli and place box on a plate. Microwave on high for 5 to 6 minutes, set aside.

3. Put margarine in a 2-quart casserole and microwave on high for 30 to 45 seconds, until melted. Stir in flour, salt and pepper, stirring until smooth. Slowly stir in milk, stirring until smooth. Leave uncovered and microwave on high for 3 minutes, stirring every minute, until sauce boils and thickens. Stir in 1/2 cup cheese, stirring until it melts. (Reserve remaining cheese for topping.)

4. Drain broccoli and stir into sauce with chicken and cooked noodles, mixing well.

5. Press an empty plastic or paper cup into the center of the food (to make a doughnut shape). Wrap remaining 1/4 cup cheese in plastic wrap or a sandwich bag and slip it into the paper cup. Wrap casserole tightly and chill. Freeze up to three months.

6. To serve: Remove package of cheese from paper cup. Microwave frozen casserole on high for 10 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes. Remove paper cup and stir casserole gently. Microwave on high for 5 to 10 minutes longer, stirring once; until hot. Sprinkle reserved cheese on top and microwave on high for 1 minute, until the cheese melts. Serves 4 to 5.

Tips: To serve without freezing: prepare as directed through step 4. Cover and microwave on high for 5 to 7 minutes, until heated

through. Add cheese topping and microwave on high for 1 minute until cheese melts.

— Leftover cubed turkey may be used instead of chicken. Or, use two cans cubed chunk chicken or tuna.

— For singles, prepare the casserole as directed above. Then divide in into 4 or 5 single servings (I use soup bowls). Wrap individually with plastic wrap and freeze. To thaw one serving, microwave on high for 5 minutes; let stand 5 minutes, stir and microwave 4 to 5 minutes longer until hot.

Note: The times above are for microwaves with 650-700 watts of power. For 500-600 W, add 10-15 seconds to each minute.

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Camden Co. 4-H Fair Opens July 30

CLEMENTON, N.J. — The Camden County 4-H Fair will be held July 30 through Aug. 1 at the 4-H Fairgrounds in the Lakeland Complex, Blackwood, N.J. Parking is \$2, but admittance is free.

The fair will begin with a parade at 6 p.m. July 30. The 4-H page, king and queen contests, with Miss New Jersey as emcee, will follow the parade. Friday and Saturday, fair hours are from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.

The fair features 4-H educational exhibits, amusement rides, game booths, pony rides, Smokey the Bear, commercial exhibits, free hay rides and much more.

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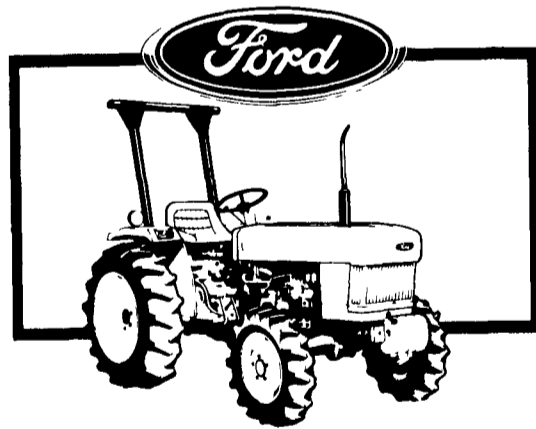
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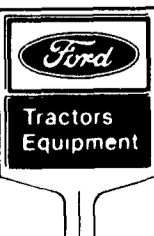
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