## Well Preserved

The Well Preserved news column is prepared by Lancaster County Cooperative Extension. It includes food preservation information and questions.

## **Freezing Vegetables**

Last week's article looked at some general guidelines for successful freezing of foods. This week we will look at specific techniques for freezing vegetables. Most vegetables freeze well with the exception of salad greens and those high in starch content such as potatoes. Some of the vegetables most difficult to can-corn, peas, and green limas-are among those easily frozen.

Select fresh, young, tender vegetables for best quality. Some varieties are more suitable for freezing than others. Sort for size, ripeness and color for uniform results. Work quickly to prevent loss of quality and nutrients. Freeze only five or six containers at a time. Ideally the vegetables will be frozen immediately after picking. If you cannot freeze them immediately, refrigerate them.

Wash and drain vegetables before peeling skins or removing shells. You want to remove surface dirt, bacteria, and insects. Wash small amounts at a time and use several changes of cold water. Lift the vegetables out of the water so that the dirt does not settle back on the food. Also, do not let the vegetables soak in water. Blanching is the key to success for freezing most vegetables. Blanching is scalding vegetables in boiling water or steam for a short time to slow or stop enzyme action.

Enzymes are the chemicals in vegetables that cause produce to ripen and unless inactivated will continue to be active during frozen storage. This results in a loss of flavor, color, and texture. Blanching also brightens the color and helps retard the loss of vitamins. Many vegetables are also easier to pack when the blanching causes wilting and softens them. Water blanching is the most common method used in home freezing. Use one gallon water per pound of prepared vegetable. It is easiest and safest to put the vegetable in a blanching basket and lower it into water that is vigorously boiling. Place a lid on the blancher and start counting blanching time immediately.

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Keep heat high for the time given in the directions for the vegetable you are freezing. The water should return to a boil within one minute of when you added the vegetables. Change the water after every three to five batches to prevent its adding strong off flavors to blanched vegetables.

Steam blanching works well for broccoli, pumpkin, sweet potatoes and winter squash. It takes about 1 1/2 times longer than water blanching. Steam blanching involves putting the food in a basket that holds it at least 3 inches above the bottom of the pot. Put an inch or two of water in the pot and bring the water to a boil. Put the vegetables in the basket in a single layer so that steam reaches all parts quickly. Cover the pot and keep heat high. Start counting steaming times as soon as the lid is on.

Some references exist for microwave blanching. Research

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shows that this method may not be effective because some enzvmes may not be inactivated. Those choosing to run the risk of low quality vegetables by microwave blanching should be sure to work in small quantities. using the directions for their specific microwave oven. Microwave blanching will not save time or energy. Blanching time is crucial and varies with the vegetable and size. Underblanching stimulates the activity of the enzymes and is worse than no blanching. Blanching too long causes loss of flavor, color, vitamins and minerals. A few blanching times for some common vegetables are as follows: Green or wax beans-3 minutes Lima beans- medium size--- 3 minutes Broccoli-1 inch flowerets-3 minutes Brussels Sprouts-medium size-4 minutes Cauliflower-1 inch flowerets-3 minutes Corn on the Cob-medium ears-9 minutes Corn-cut from cob after blanching-4 minutes Onions for cooking (blanch until center is heated)-3 to 7 minutes Green peas-2 minutes Summer Squash-2 minutes As soon as blanching is complete, cool the vegetables quickly to stop the cooking process. Plunge the vegetables immediately into a large quantity of cold water, 60 degrees F or below. Change the water frequently or use cold running water or iced water.

If ice is used, about one pound of ice for each pound of vegetable is needed. Cooling vegetables should take the same amount of time as blanching. Drain the vegetables thoroughly after cooking. Extra moisture can cause a loss of quality when vegetables are frozen. Vegetables can be dry packed or tray packed (individually quick frozen). Remove as much air as possible. Vegetables that pack loosely such as cauliflower do not need headspace. Vegetable juices need 1 to  $1 \frac{1}{2}$  inches headspace. Allow 1/2 inch head space for other vegetables. Tray packing involves spreading the blanched, cooled, and drained vegetable in a single layer on shallow trays or pans and placing them in the freezer just long enough to freeze firm. Check them often after the first hour because long exposure of uncovered vegetables will result in loss of moisture. Vegetables packed by this method will remain loose and can be poured from the container and the package reclosed.

If you have food preservation questions, a Home Economist is available to answer questions on Wednesdays 10 a.m.-1 p.m., call (717) 394-6851 or write Penn State Cooperative Extension, Lancaster County, 1383 Arcadia Rd., Rm.1, Lancaster, PA, 17601.

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<sup>5</sup>184plus shipping 5 gallon pail. (Makes 55 gallons)

Stor Alton





Some stainless steel will take on a bluish cast when it's washed in the dishwasher. This happens because of the heat of the water and the alkalinity of the dishwasher detergent. To remove the discoloration, use a stainless steel cleaner.

> **Resource: Cleanliness Facts** The Soap and Detergent Association



