

# Well Preserved

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

## Freezing Fruits

This is the third in a series of articles on freezing foods.

Freezing fruits involves the basic skills discussed previously including starting with fresh, firm, quality produce; working with small quantities; and keeping the freezer at 0 degrees F. or below.

Remember to lift produce out of the water when washing it so that the dirt washed off doesn't settle back on the food. Do not soak fruit. Avoid using galvanized, copper, or iron equipment because the acid in the fruit could react with the metals to form harmful compounds or off flavors.

During freezing, the water in the fruit expands and breaks the cell walls. That is why thawed fruits sometimes have a soft, mushy texture. This is more noticeable in more watery fruits such as cantaloupe or honeydew melon. To maintain as much of the crisp texture as possible, fruits should be frozen at the lowest possible setting on the freezer. Nutritional loss is lower when the freezer is cold, and a constant storage temperature helps in retention of quality.



Fluctuating temperatures causes damage to the texture as the ice melts and then refreezes in the cell.

Browning or discoloration can be a problem in light colored fruits such as peaches, apples, pears, and apricots. Ascorbic acid or vitamin C is the most effective way to prevent this. Commercial ascorbic acid mixtures are also available. Citric acid and lemon juice are sometimes used but are less effective and may affect the flavor of the fruit.

Iowa State University Extension Service also identifies a solution of sodium bisulfite (USP grade) as an antidarkening agent. However it may be difficult to find and should not be used if individuals are sulfite sensitive.

Scalding or steaming is sometimes used to prevent browning for fruits that will be cooked before use.

Although fruit may be packed unsweetened, the flavor, color, and texture of most fruits are retained best when fruit is packed with some sweetening. You can use either a dry sugar or a syrup pack. The type of pack will depend on the intended use.

Fruits packed in syrup are usually best for uncooked dessert use. Fruits packed in dry sugar or unsweetened are best for most cooking purposes because there is less liquid in the product.

When using a dry sugar pack, a three to one ratio is usually used. That means three pounds of fruit to one pound of sugar or one quart fruit to 1/2 cup sugar. Less sugar can be used according to taste.

Sprinkle the sugar over the fruit and gently stir until fruit is coated with sugar and juice forms. Soft sliced fruits such as peaches, strawberries, figs, de-seeded grapes, plums and cherries will yield sufficient syrup for covering if the fruit is layered with sugar and allowed to stand 15 minutes.

The proportion of sugar to water in a syrup pack depends upon the sweetness of the fruit to be frozen. A 40 percent syrup is used for most fruits while a lighter syrup is desirable for mild-flavored fruits to prevent masking of flavors. Heavier syrup may be needed for very sour fruits. A 30 percent syrup uses two cups sugar to four cups water. A 40 percent syrup uses three cups sugar to four cups

water. Make the sugar syrup by dissolving the sugar in the water over heat. Chill and use just enough to cover the fruit. Each pint will require 1/2 to 3/4 cup syrup. Keep the fruit under the syrup with a small piece of crumpled, water-resistant wrapping material on top of the fruit.

Fruit may be frozen without sugar for use in jams, jellies, pies, or for special diets. Fruit may also be packed in its own juice, other fruit juices, or water to which an anti-darkening agent is added.

Unsweetened packs generally yield a product that does not have the plump texture and good color of those packed with sugar. The fruits freeze harder and take longer to thaw. However, gooseberries, currants, cranberries, blueberries, raspberries, steamed apples, and rhubarb freeze well without sugar.

Artificial sweeteners may be used in any of the unsweetened packs. Saccharin and aspartame work well in frozen products, or they can be added to the fruit just before serving. Artificial sweeteners give a sweet flavor but do not furnish the beneficial effects of sugar such as color protection and firmness. Use directions on the sugar substitute container to determine the amount of sweetener needed.

Pectin syrup can be used to freeze fruits that have a poor texture when frozen without sugar. Susan Reynolds of the University of Florida suggests pectin syrup as a solution to im-

proving the texture of fruits such as strawberries or peaches frozen in water or juice.

To make pectin syrup combine one package powdered pectin and one cup water in a saucepan. Heat to boiling and boil one minute. Remove from heat and add 1 1/4 cups more water. Cool. Makes about three cups of moderately thick syrup. Add more water if thinner syrup is desired.

Pack fruit into pectin syrup as you would any syrup pack. This is an expensive alternative to freezing in a sugar syrup but may be a good choice for those on special diets.

Use frozen fruits within 8 to 12 months for best quality. Unsweetened fruits lose their quality faster than those sweetened with sugar or syrup. To use frozen fruits, thaw the fruit in the refrigerator in its original package. For faster defrosting, the package can be submerged in lukewarm water or partially defrosted in the microwave oven.

Many people prefer frozen fruit with a few ice crystals still remaining because completely thawed fruits will be limp or mushy.

If you have food preservation questions, a home economist is available to answer questions on Wednesdays 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., call (717) 394-6851 or write Penn State Cooperative Extension, Lancaster County, 1383 Arcadia Rd., Rm.1, Lancaster, PA, 17601.

## Blue Ribbons Await

MEYERSDALE (Somerset Co.) — If you're famous throughout your community and social circles for delicious, mouthwatering, homemade jams and jellies, then it's time to receive statewide recognition for your talent.

Sure-Jell® Fruit Pectin is once again sponsoring the jam and jelly competition at the Somerset County Fair. Entries will be judged on appearance, texture and taste. Blue ribbons, cash prizes and gift bags will be awarded to the best jam and jelly makers. All participants will receive a free entrants bag containing several "goodies" that

will prove helpful in preparing jams and jellies.

Deadline for entering this competition is Aug. 17. Be sure to check the competition rules and guidelines before selecting and preparing jam and jelly recipes for submission. Judging will take place before the Somerset County Fair, which runs from Aug. 18-24. For complete details and official competition rules, contact the state fair office at (814) 634-8187.

For tips on preparing homemade jams and jellies, visit [www.surejell.com](http://www.surejell.com).

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