

# Freezing Foods Guide



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## Best Foods to Freeze

Some foods are better than others when it comes to freezer storage; for some reason, fried foods are not one of those “better” foods. The reason freezing works well for some and not others is due, in part, to the water content of the stored food. Generally, as the water content goes up, freezing quality goes out the window. Just think about an orange or watermelon that has been frozen, kind of gets that mealy taste. Let’s take a look at a few of the best foods to freeze.

### Meats

There is nothing like pulling some hamburger patties out of the freezer the day before, firing up the grill and getting some close friends to gather ‘round for a good dose of laughs and entertainment. The reason this is possible is because meat is a great food for freezer storage.

Meat freezes so well because they are incredibly dense. Because there are few places for air to hide in a piece of meat, a high quality steak, or even a low quality steak, will last for at least 4 months if kept frozen. While meats do freeze alright pre-cooked, they will preserve the best in their uncooked format.

### Fruits & Vegetables

Believe it or not, frozen vegetables are usually fresher than fresh vegetables. This is because they are frozen at their peak ripeness. Many of us do not have a flash freezer in our homes, which is what the giant corporations use in order to chill their fruits and veggies, so the best procedure to follow is to blanch in boiling water for 1-2 minutes, allow cooling and then freezing.

Blanching allows the full bright color to come out as well as the nutrients. Once frozen, all activity will stop and resume upon thawing and cooking. It is also important to remember to freeze fruits and veggies individually, until slightly frozen, then bag them so they do not freeze in a massive block of pure goodness.

### What’s left?

Right now you might be thinking to yourself, well, if meat and fruits and veggies are all good to freeze, what types of foods are not good to freeze? You seem to have all the bases covered with those three categories. The best way to figure out if foods will freeze well is to take a look at their liquid content.

If the product is not normally watery, such as milk or lettuce, then the thawed product will not be of the highest quality. Soups, on the other hand, are made up mostly of water, so the ice melting when thawing, just re-liquefies the base stock. The best way to think about which foods freeze the best is to think about the quality when it is thawed.

If foods have high water content, imagine that water turning into ice, stretching out the bonds that hold the food together, and then melting when thawed. Will your food act like a piece of meat, or a piece of lettuce? If all else fails, try freezing a small batch and see how well it thaws.

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## Picking a Freezer for Your Needs

Not everyone needs a full 500 cubic foot deep freezer; but there are so many choices, how can you ever pick which one is right for you? Let's take a look at a few common points to consider when picking out the best freezer to meet your needs.

### Size

Size is not the same as space, which we will cover in a minute. By size, I am talking about the amount of room you have to store a freezer. Many people forego a deep freezer because they do not have the room to put such a huge piece of deep-freezing goodness.

It is important to think about the room you will have for a freezer because that will play a big factor in the type of freezer you can buy. If you have a large space available, you will be able to choose from a wide variety of freezer selections, however if you only have the standard fridge/freezer combo space, you must make every square foot count.

### Space

What exactly are you trying to put into your freezer? If you are a hunter and wish to stuff a side-by-side with an entire deer, you might want to rethink your strategy. Likewise, if you are a single person who loves to freeze pancakes, you might not want to opt in for the deep freezer. Space is taking into consideration what you want to freeze and the amount of room you need to do it.

Don't just think about what you have to store now, but what you have in mind to freeze later. While it is all good that you have 10 frozen pizzas in your upright freezer, you might want to consider the fact that you were considering once a month cooking and soon you will need all of the room you can get.

### Style

Once you have figured out what size area you have and what exactly you are planning on storing, it is on to figuring out if you really need a deep freezer, or if a standard freezer will suite your needs just fine. While it may be nice to have a deep freezer in the case of emergencies, you may only need a simple fridge/freezer combo to take care of all your needs.

While style is mostly about looks and less about functionality, this should be the last thing you need to worry about. Figure out what works best and feels the most comfortable for you. If you like the way a side-by-side looks over a bottom shelf, then go for that. Do you need a chest deep freezer, or can you get by with a stand up freezer with efficient shelving? These are all decisions that you must make; no one can make them for you.

It is most important, when choosing a freezer, to first consider your needs and available resources. Once you have looked at your size and space issues, then you will be able to choose based on looks.

## Proper Freezer Temperature

The invention of the freezer was a giant step in food preservation because freezing food stops bacterial growth. Having the ability to quickly chill down food and store it at a temperature where bacteria doesn't grow, means that food can be kept for a long time without spoiling. Notice, however, that I didn't say freezing the food would kill the bacteria, so as soon as the freezer starts warming up, the bacterial decay will start up again.

While water begins to freeze at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, most foods need a much lower temperature, about -10 degrees Fahrenheit, in order to properly freeze. The perfect temperature for storing frozen food is 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Of course, many people do not have the luxury of owning two freezers, one they can set for initially freezing the food and another only set to store the food, so a good compromise is around -7 degrees Fahrenheit.

You might begin to ask why the best compromise isn't exactly half of the difference, which would put it around -5 degrees Fahrenheit, and that is a great question. The faster food freezes, the smaller the ice crystals that form. Smaller ice crystals mean less chance of food dehydration and oxidation, leading to freezer burn. So while it is good to store food at 0 degrees Fahrenheit, the freezer should really be colder in order to freeze food quickly and also have more room to fluctuate when adding new foods.

Contrary to popular belief, temperature is not the sole cause freezer burn. Freezer burn is the dehydration of your food by the air. As the moisture leaves the food, it escapes into the air in the freezer. Keeping your freezer at the proper temperature will help to control the level of moisture in the air. The cooler the temperature is in the freezer, the less it will heat up while putting new food in. The less the freezer heats up, the less moisture will be released into the air.

One of the best ways to keep your freezer cold and keep your operating expense down is to keep your freezer full. A full freezer will stay colder longer and it is easier to keep frozen foods cold rather than try to cool all the air in the freezer. While a full freezer will keep food cold for two days during a power outage, a half full freezer will only keep food cold for about 12 hours. Other pantry items, such as flour, dry beans or rice can be added to fill up space in the freezer and help add some bulk when you have extra space.

While many people leave their freezer where it was set from the store, it is important to actively look at and adjust your freezer temperature. Make sure it is set between 0 and -10 degrees Fahrenheit, with the ideal temperature to be about -7 degrees. Also, try your best to keep your freezer full at all times, and when it starts to get empty, substitute some pantry items to make up for empty room. Once you get into the routine of keeping your freezer at a certain temperature, you will be amazed at the difference between the quality of your food and the amount of your electric bill.

## How to Properly Store Frozen Food

Keeping frozen food, well, frozen, is the main purpose of a freezer. Believe it or not, your freezer cannot accomplish this on its own. Your freezer needs you. Let's take a look at a few of the important aspects of properly storing frozen food.

### Location, Location, Location

It only makes sense to store and stack food items in the order they will be used. Food close to, or in the door does not stay as cold as the food located in the back parts of the freezer. Smart stacking will help improve your end results, because one of the contributing factors to freezer burn is the constant thawing and re-freezing of foods.

### Full vs. Empty

Your freezer has to work to keep all the food cold. Think of it like a portable cooler full of food. The less items in the cooler, the more ice you must put in to keep it cold. When the cooler is full, the cold food helps keep the inside temperature cold and thus you need less ice. Your freezer works the same way. Keeping a full freezer means less work keeping everything else frozen, plus it will stay cold longer if your power goes out.

### Techniques

A great way to store fruits and vegetables for the long haul is by freezing them. This takes them at the peak of their flavor and color and puts a sudden halt to the ripening process.

Before freezing vegetables, they should be blanched for a few minutes. This allows the colors to come out and the flavors to develop. Once they have been blanched, they should be left to cool to room temperature and then frozen individually before being bagged up. Laying them out on a sheet pan and put into the freezer for three to five hours can do this. Once they have started to freeze, then and only then, should they be bagged together.

Fruits are a little different. Because of the sugar content in most fruits, the cells need to retain the sugar content, so it is advised to freeze the fruits in simple syrup or a sugar compound with a little ascorbic acid to slow down the oxidation process. The oxidation that occurs is usually what discolors the fruit and give it the brown appearance.

If you plan on storing large amounts of meat, break them down into smaller portion sizes before freezing because this will make thawing easier for individual servings. Keep the meat in the original packaging, if possible, and make sure there are no holes or perforations in the packaging. Most typical meats can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two days at the proper temperature. If you are not planning to use the meat before this time, consider freezing and then thawing. If you do not plan on using the meat within two months, over-wrap the meat with a heavy-duty plastic wrap or put it into an acceptable freezer bag.

Help your freezer out. Keep the long-term storage items in the back, keep your freezer stocked, and practice proper freezing techniques. These simple tips will keep your food fresh and also help to lower your energy bill – an added benefit.

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## How to Prevent Freezer Burn

Many of us have had the experience. You are excited about having people over for the cookout. There are plans for good food and good times, which have been in the works for weeks. You bought the burgers, steaks and chicken almost a month ago so there wouldn't be any last minute stress trying to rush to the store. You took precautions to get home quick, while the meat was still cold and to get it, promptly, into the freezer.

The morning of the party, you pull the meat out, only to your horror to find huge ice crystals and a color of meat, which doesn't even classify as a color. You have just been freezer-burned. But you did everything within your power to prevent the icy chill that is well known for ruining parties; or did you? Let's take a deeper look into ways you can prevent freezer burn.

### Consistency

Before we can effectively stop freezer burn, it is important to know what causes it. When foods are frozen, the water inside begins to form ice crystals. While food doesn't freeze at the same time, the ice crystals begin to form on the coldest part. As the crystals form, the water from other areas in the food start to migrate to the coldest part, leaving the rest of the food dehydrated. As freezer burn begins to occur, food may become oxidized where the water has left, changing the smell and flavor, usually for the worse.

Trying to keep your food at a consistent temperature is an important part of stopping freezer burn. This is one reason it is important to keep your freezer as close to the same temperature as possible. It also helps if the freezer is full, so when the door is opened, it doesn't have to work as hard to cool everything down again. It is usually the fluctuation above Zero degrees when frost burn and oxidation occur.

### Packaging

Once the ice crystals begin to form, if any oxygen gets to the food, it will start the oxidation process. In order to prevent oxidation and further freezer burn, it is important to package the food tightly so as little of the surface is exposed as possible. Many people opt for the vacuum sealers, which remove as much air as it can and try to create a seal that does not leak.

### Storage

Just as important as packaging food for the freezer, is the amount of time you plan on leaving it in the freezer. The longer food is in the freezer, the more opportunity it has to begin the process of freezer burn. There are many tables and charts, which list maximum freezing times for different foods. It is always a good idea to hand write a "best by" date on the package so you know exactly how long it has been in the freezer and if it should still be viable.

Preventing freezer burn is simple as long as you keep a consistent temperature, ensure the proper packaging techniques and don't leave the food in the freezer for too long. Sure, it takes a little more work to keep all of these practices up, but it also keeps money in your pocket by preventing freezer burn and having to throw food away.

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## How to Freeze Meats

Meat is probably the most expensive thing that people freeze. It is extremely important to pay close attention when freezing meat, so that it does not go bad in the process. It is best to cut the meat into individual portions before freezing because the meat could spoil if it has to be thawed and reheated numerous times. Once the meat is cut, it should be chilled, covered, to about 40 degrees, and over-wrapped with a thick plastic wrap before being put into an airtight container.

### Freezer Temperature

It is important to keep meat chilled to at least 40 degrees. This will help maintain the safe temperature of the meat so no bacteria can grow. Once you get home from the store, immediately put the meat away. Double check the temperature in your refrigerator to ensure it is between 35 and 40 degrees and that your freezer is at zero degrees or a little below. Having your freezer set to the proper temperature, between 0 and –10 degrees Fahrenheit, will help the meat freeze faster, develop smaller ice crystals and prevent freezer burn as much as possible.

### Large Amounts of Meat

If you plan on storing large amounts of meat, break them down into smaller portion sizes before freezing because this will make thawing easier for individual servings. Keep the meat in the original packaging, if possible, and make sure there are no holes or perforations in the packaging. Most typical meats can be stored in the refrigerator for up to two days at the proper temperature. If you are not planning to use the meat before this time, consider freezing and then thawing. If you do not plan on using the meat within two months, over-wrap the meat with a heavy-duty plastic wrap or put it into an acceptable freezer bag.

We have already gone over how freezer burn occurs, so it is important to get the meat as cold as possible, as quickly as possible. While the normal freezer should be set around 0 degrees Fahrenheit for storing food, you should turn your freezer down to about –10 degrees Fahrenheit the day before so that the freezer has time to prepare for the unfrozen food that is about to be added.

### Once Frozen

Once the meat is frozen, you should store it on the bottom of the freezer. As the cold air radiates from the other food in the freezer, it will help to keep the meat frozen and keep the strain off of the freezer. It is important to remember once meat is frozen, it should not be thawed and re-frozen again. This will lead to serious oxidation and freezer burn.

In order to keep your meat as fresh as possible, it is important to set your freezer to the proper temperature so that it freezes quickly, the meat is cut up and initially frozen into individual portions, then once frozen, the meat is not thawed and re-frozen. Follow these simple tips and your meat will stay fresh for as long as possible.



## Freezer Containers

Freezer burn is one of the worst things that can happen to foods stored in the freezer. Freezer burn occurs when thousands of tiny water molecules turn into ice crystals within the food. This event causes the food to lose moisture and to have the “parched” look. Not only does the water escape and freeze, but also, oxygen gets into the pores of your food, causing the once-bright color to fade and the flavor to dissipate. Proper storage in containers fit for the freezer will help to reduce the amount of freezer burn your foods endure as well as save you money because less will need to be thrown out.

What to look for in a proper freezing container:

No matter where your container is going, whether it is on your kitchen counter, in your pantry or in the icebox, there are a few basic rules to follow in choosing the right container.

1. Air tight – Make sure your container has a good locking system and a rubber gasket that goes around the top in order to seal out air and moisture. This will slow the process of spoiling and also keep the contents inside fresh for a longer period of time because it locks air out of the container.
2. Different sizes – The more sizes you have, the less space you waste. By filling a container up as much as possible, there is less room for air inside the container, which is what aids in the breakdown process. Not to mention, having different sizes, makes it convenient to stack, store and save different products; there is no reason to keep raisins in a container meant to hold spaghetti, unless of course, you happen to have that many raisins.
3. Easy marking surface – A surface that is easy to mark, erase, and mark again is extremely important. Having a good writing surface makes it easy to label what is in each container, especially if the containers are not translucent. This also aids in organizing your pantry and freezer since you can put like items together and even alphabetize them if you would like. If you can't find a good surface to write on, you can use a streak of chalkboard paint around the container to make marking easier.
4. Stacking ability – Many containers these days have locking lids, which means your foods will stack more safely as you lock the bottom of one container into the lid of the other. This is a great way to keep foods together and also keep your freezer from becoming a jungle of mangled frozen foods.

A good container makes all of the difference when storing your food in your pantry or freezer. If you don't have a set of decent quality containers, go to the local store and pick some up, just remember, they don't have to be expensive in order to meet all of the criteria.

## Freezer Meals

At some point, life catches up with everyone. We get into a routine, a rut if you will, and we end up eating the same thing over and over each day. Why not step out of your groove and have a quick and easy meal ready to go when you are? A new popular trend for people on the go is called “monthly cooking.” Taking a day, or a weekend, each month, you prepare all of your meals for the rest of the month. Sure, this sounds rather daunting, but think about how much time it will save during the rest of the month if you can just grab a healthy breakfast and get your day going.

Monthly cooking can simplify your life, but there is more thought that goes into it than you may initially consider. Some meals freeze great, while others struggle to keep together under the frosty environment of your freezer. Let’s take a look at a few meal ideas for each part of the day, which freeze well enough to satisfy your craving for something new for the rest of the month.

What types of meals freeze the best?

### Breakfast

Breakfast foods are usually difficult to think about freezing, for instance, how would you feel about frozen eggs? Probably not so good, nor is it a grand idea. The best way to begin thinking about frozen breakfast foods is to look no further than the aisles of your grocery store, which already has a slew of frozen breakfast items.

Pancakes and waffles are a great breakfast food to freeze. Once you cook them, freeze them individually on a baking tray, then once frozen, place all of them in a giant Ziploc bag. In the morning, you can grab a couple, throw them in the toaster, drizzle some syrup and you have homemade pancakes in less than two minutes.

Another breakfast idea is to freeze sausage or bacon. Of course, it is important to cook the food first, leaving it just under the appropriate doneness so that when it is reheated, it will finish cooking the rest of the way.

### Lunch

Lunch, again, another seemingly difficult food time to prepare for in advance, only takes a little bit of foresight into your grocery store freezer. Some foods, like burritos and any type of pocket sandwich, are generally cooked in advance and only need a slight reheat in order to be enjoyed. Other foods, like personal pizzas and rice, bean and cheese burritos, are usually layered and frozen before cooking so they get the fresh taste cooked in when preparing.

### Dinner

Dinners are usually the most frozen of the meals. Almost anything that can be baked can be frozen either uncooked or partially cooked. For instance, casseroles can be cooked, and then frozen, while pasta dishes like lasagna should be partially cooked, layered and then frozen, left to finish cooking when ready to eat.

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A few other great ideas for frozen dinners would be beans and rice, soups, and even some pies. There are a wide variety of foods that can freeze well and make life much more convenient when it comes to preparing food for the entire family. Look for some meal ideas and recipes and try making your own frozen meals, they are better for you and you know exactly what is going in to them.

## Are Vacuum Sealers Worth It?

Many people swear by vacuum sealers while others detest them to the utmost degree. From the infomercials seen on TV, to the shelves of clearance items at your local general store, vacuum sealers are all over the place declaring their superiority over simple human packaging. Has the thought ever crossed your mind; "Are vacuum sealers really worth their high price and cheap looking design?" Well, if it has, you are in luck because we are going to take a look at what makes a good vacuum sealer and if they are really worth all of the hype.

### Sealing Mechanism

It doesn't matter how much air a vacuum sealer can suck out of a package. If the mechanism used to seal the package does not work properly or leaves holes in the seal, you might as well have thrown your money into a fire. Some vacuum sealers have specialized bags that work specifically with the sealer to make sure the sealing mechanism doesn't cause holes or tares.

The sealer works by slightly heating up the sides of the bag and pressing them together in order to melt the plastic to a point where no holes occur. Some sealers get too hot and end up burning through the plastic, creating possible entry points for air. When choosing a vacuum sealer, usually the ones with specifically designed bags work best because the plastic is composed of the exact make-up needed to prevent melting or holes.

### Suction

Just like melted bags, a vacuum sealer is completely pointless if it doesn't do what it says it will do; vacuum. Some of the sealers on the market today, either because they are poorly powered or do not have the best hardware, have extremely low amounts of suction for their intended use.

There is, of course, a flip side to this situation, which is a vacuum sealer with too much power behind the vacuum. When there is too much suction, the food inside the pouch can actually become crushed. Another problem with a lot of suction is that food can become partially dehydrated, which we discussed, leads to an increased chance for freezer burn. It is important to look for a vacuum sealer, which can control the amount of suction it puts on a piece of food as to not demolish it.

### Worth it?

As many variables as vacuum sealers can have, it is not worth investing the money unless you do some serious research first and are willing to give up a few green ones in place of the Ziploc and straw method. If you have the time and patience, you could try numerous ones out to see if they work well, but you can get the same freezer results if you take the time to correctly package your foods.

In the end, it is eventually up to you alone whether you want to spend the money on the vacuum sealer, just remember to check for holes in your bags and also to initially freeze your bagged food to keep it from getting destroyed and helping to prevent freezer burn.

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## Maximize Your Freezer Space

If you have ever had a freezer, you know how frustrating it can be to walk in from the store only to realize there is not enough room for your three frozen pizzas, five pounds of ground beef and a gallon container of your favorite ice cream. Usually this is remedied by getting frustrated, pulling everything out of your freezer and re-stacking everything like your life depended on it, in order to get the door shut. Surely there has to be a better way to maximize your freezer space. Let's take a look at a few ideas to fore-go your freezer frustrations.

### Containers

Having specific containers to put your frozen items in, makes increasing your freezer space easy. Containers stack well, unlike full Ziploc bags, which bulge and bloat when frozen. Having a set of containers that are dedicated for the freezer means you can stuff and stack to your heart's content.

The best containers to use are ones with thick walls and locking lids. If the lids do not lock, there is a good chance you will have freezer burn when you pull them out to use later. The thick walls will help the containers hold up under the pressure of stacking, and also ensure they are reusable after many months of freezing.

### Removable Shelves

Stacking food in freezers is more akin to trying to stack soup, especially if you have a deep freezer. It seems as though freezer manufacturers all got together and designed the shelves to be extremely tall and unable to completely fill. Using shelves makes your freezer more stacking-friendly.

You can purchase simple plastic shelving from your local general store, which basically doubles your storage space by the square foot. Items don't need to be stacked as high and the air is allowed to move around the food more, so your freezer doesn't have to work as hard.

### Keep Clean

Sure, things can freeze for quite some time, but do you really think the Ziploc bag of half eaten banana will get used if it has already been in there for over a year? Highly unlikely, get rid of it.

Going through and cleaning out your freezer every once in a while will do two important things for you. First, it will let you keep track of everything that you have in your freezer. This lets you know what you can use in the next few weeks or months, helping you save money instead of wasting food. Secondly, your freezer gets a scheduled cleaning as you go through everything, and re-arrange and stack.

There are some simple things you can do to maximize your freezer storage space. Using good quality containers, adding additional shelving and cleaning out your freezer on a consistent basis all help with increasing your storage capabilities. You will be surprised with a little organization and the occasional cleaning; your freezer will work better and be able to store everything you need it to.