Freezing Food During Quarantine

Many people are bulk buying or just shopping every 10 days or so, limiting trips to the store, maintaining social distancing recommendations and limiting exposure to public places. Fruits and vegetables seem to be the most vulnerable to spoilage. Purchasing local produce may last longer, as it has had less time in transit from the farm to kitchen. Consider buying local through a CSA, farmers’ market or farm stand. Here are some tips on freezing fresh produce.

**Lobster** can be frozen whole, in the shell, just wrapped tightly to keep oxygen out. Cooked lobster can be frozen but the quality of the meat is not as good. Live oysters can be frozen after the shells are washed, then whole oysters are placed in an airtight container or bag. Shucked oysters can be frozen with their liquor in containers, leaving headspace of about ½”. The flavor may change and therefore may be best in a casserole or stew. Shucked scallops would be frozen using the same method. Lean fish like flounder can be filleted then placed in a brine of ¼ cup salt to 1 quart of cold water for 20 seconds, then frozen in airtight containers or bags. Fatty fish like mackerel, bluefish, tuna or salmon are best dipped in a brine of 2 tablespoons of crystalline ascorbic acid and 1 quart of water for 20 seconds, then frozen. This keeps the fish from going rancid or getting an 'off' flavor. For more information on freezing fish [https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/fish.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/fish.html)

**Meat and poultry** purchased at the store has a plastic wrap that is not moisture or vapor resistant. Freezing these ‘as is’ would result in ice crystals which would impact quality over time. These should be overwrapped in another airtight bag, or tightly wrapped in foil. Alternatively, meat can be re-wrapped with butcher or freezer paper, wrapped tightly and then frozen.

**Eggs** can be frozen by cracking them into a bowl, blending white and yolk while being careful not to add more air. Add ¼ teaspoon salt OR 1 ½ tablespoons of sugar to 1 cup of egg mixture and freeze in an airtight container. Add sugar if eggs will be used in baked goods, or salt if used for more savory dishes. Freezing the egg mixture in ice cube trays would make for easy portioning ie: one cube=one egg.

**Dairy products** can be frozen, too. Butter, yogurt and cream cheese can be frozen. Milk freezes well but may need to be shaken when thawed due to separation of fat from the freezing process. Cheese can be frozen, but the texture may change, and may be best used in cooked foods as it can be crumbly.

Freezing quickly is best, as it creates small ice crystals which may be more protective of the cell structure in the vegetables, resulting in a better texture. Berries can be frozen on a jelly roll pan in a single layer then put into a container. This way they don’t clump together, and it is easier to take out what is needed.

**How to freeze:** Peppers are easy: wash them, cut in half to remove the seeds and slice if desired, then freeze in airtight containers. Most vegetables for freezing are best blanched in boiling water then placed in an ice bath to stop the cooking process. Blanching hals the enzymes in the vegetables so the ripening doesn’t continue in the freezer. The amount of time varies with the type of vegetable. Broccoli and cauliflower need about 3 minutes, but fresh greens or peas may only need 2 minutes. It is important to note that over blanching would impact flavor, texture and result in vitamin and mineral loss. Under blanching would stimulate the enzymes and encourage the ripening of the produce. Pumpkin and winter squash are best cooked thoroughly, then frozen. For more information on blanching see [https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/blanching.html](https://nchfp.uga.edu/how/freeze/blanching.html)

For more information on freezing and other types of food preservation, visit the National Home Food Preservation website at [https://nchfp.uga.edu/](https://nchfp.uga.edu/)