

## **MSU Extension Publication Archive**

Archive copy of publication, do not use for current recommendations. Up-to-date information about many topics can be obtained from your local Extension office.

Home Freezing of Prepared Foods  
Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service  
F Folder Series  
Anita Dean, Foods and Nutrition  
Reprinted October 1965  
7 pages

The PDF file was provided courtesy of the Michigan State University Library

**Scroll down to view the publication.**

# HOME FREEZING OF PREPARED FOODS



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE • EAST LANSING

# HOME FREEZING OF PREPARED FOODS

By ANITA DEAN

*Extension Specialist in Foods and Nutrition*

Freezing is a highly satisfactory and easy way to preserve meats, poultry, fish, fruits, and vegetables. These foods will add an infinite variety to your daily menus and deserve first place in your home freezer.

As supplies of these best frozen foods are used, many freezer owners use the available space for storing prepared and precooked foods.

## LET'S FACE A FEW FACTS ABOUT FREEZING PREPARED FOODS

First of all, there really is no substitute for freshly prepared foods. Food tastes best when it is skillfully prepared and promptly served. The most delicious food loses flavor, eye appeal, and nutritive value when reheated.

Freezing frequently changes texture and flavor of cooked foods. Many seasonings are altered—some strengthened and others fade. Certain fats are likely to become rancid if stored too long. Hard cooked egg whites toughen and vegetables lose crispness. Lobster, crab, and shrimp gradually toughen during prolonged storage. In general, freezing precooked vegetables does not seem to be desirable. They lose flavor, color, texture, and food value. Puddings, sauces, and gravies thickened with cornstarch or flour often curdle and separate when frozen and thawed.

Few dishes can go directly from the freezer to the table. Most require at least 30 to 40 minutes of reheating and many require additional time for thawing. Why waste valuable freezer space on dishes which can be prepared as quickly as they can be thawed and reheated? Fuel costs are increased and little or no time is saved.

The storage life of most frozen prepared foods is short. It is extremely important to know the recommended storage life of each food you freeze. Plan to use these foods while they are best in flavor and food value.

## USE YOUR FREEZER TO BEST ADVANTAGE

A freezer may prove a convenience in many ways. As your stock of frozen meats, fruits, and vegetables dwindles, it may be possible to use your freezer to store frozen foods purchased at a discount. Many families find it handy and economical to purchase a large roast or turkey. They have it split in half so that a portion can be cooked for immediate use and the other part frozen for future use.

You save time and trouble by doubling or tripling your favorite recipes if they are well suited to freezing. These foods will be convenient to serve on busy days.

Meal preparation and entertaining can be simplified by advance preparation and freezing of a dessert or salad or freshly baked rolls.

## WHEN PREPARING COOKED FOODS FOR THE FREEZER

Use good judgment in deciding which cooked foods to freeze. Recipes that have a variety of ingredients and take a long time to prepare such as individual chicken and beef pies and spaghetti sauce and baked beans can be doubled or tripled. The extra supply can be frozen for quick reheating later.

When preparing casseroles or combination main dishes, check your recipes very carefully. Make sure all ingredients can be frozen. If not suitable, omit them and add when reheating. Slightly undercook foods that will be reheated before serving. This is particularly important when preparing vegetables for stew. When using seasonings which strengthen during freezer storage, use about half as much as usual and then season to taste when you reheat the food. Add crisp toppings such as bread crumbs just before baking.

Pastes such as macaroni, noodles, and spaghetti do not freeze well. Plan to freeze sauces such as spaghetti sauce separately and add to freshly cooked paste at serving time. Or combine sauce and spaghetti and bake just before serving.

Concentrated meat stock freezes well. Cool rapidly and package for freezing. It is advisable to omit vegetables which do not freeze successfully, such as potatoes, until reheating. Vegetable puree can be

frozen and then added to stock or milk in double boiler and reheated.

Take great care in handling, preparing, cooking, cooling, freezing, storing, thawing, and reheating of precooked foods. Immaculately clean preparation of food is essential. Freezing does not sterilize food; it simply retards bacterial action. To avoid contamination, handle cooked foods quickly, cool rapidly, and package immediately for freezing. If a cooked product remains warm very long, the growth of bacteria will increase and the flavor, color, texture, and vitamin content is likely to deteriorate. Hot mixtures can be chilled quickly by setting the pan, dish or casserole in cold running water or ice water or in the refrigerator.

Sauces and gravies thickened with flour and corn-starch are likely to curdle and separate when frozen. Sometimes they recombine if stirred when reheating.

### **WHEN YOU PREPARE SAUCES AND GRAVIES**

- Avoid using excessive amounts of fat since fats tend to separate after freezing.
- Remove sauces prepared from flour and corn-starch from heat just as soon as thickened and cool, package, and freeze. Uncooked starch will continue to cook when the food is reheated.
- When preparing sauces for meat or combination dishes, substitute meat or chicken broth for  $\frac{1}{2}$  or more of the milk.
- Freeze stews without thickening. Add thickening when reheating.
- Cheese in sauce tends to produce a rough texture. Processed cheese makes a smoother sauce than natural cheese.
- Use waxy rice flour as a thickening agent when preparing sauces, puddings, and desserts for the freezer. This flour is not yet available to the homemaker but is being used commercially.

### **PACKAGE COOKED FOODS CAREFULLY**

1. Use packaging materials and containers which are
  - Moisture-vapor-proof, non absorbent, odorless, tasteless.
  - Easy to fill, handle, seal, and label.
  - Economical of storage space.

2. If desired, freeze food in casserole or pan in which it is to be reheated. When frozen, dip container into warm water and slip contents out, package and freeze. Replace in original utensil for reheating. Flat casseroles will heat faster than deep ones.
3. In order to exclude all possible air
  - Wrap snugly. A close fitting wrap which clings to the food helps keep air out.
  - Shake down foods to remove air in the mass.
  - Place a layer of gravy or sauce on the bottom of the container before adding solid food and then cover completely with gravy or sauce.
  - Tightly seal all closures; wrap with a drug store type wrap.
  - To remove air from plastic bags, press the bag from the bottom up until all air is removed or lower the filled bag into a kettle of water until the water comes to the level of the food.
4. Allow some space at top since most foods will expand during freezing.
5. Label each package plainly with name of food, method of preparation, and date.

### **CORRECT FREEZING AND STORING TEMPERATURES ARE IMPORTANT**

1. Place packages against freezing plates or coils. When completely frozen, place in storage compartment.
2. Leave a little space between packages to permit circulation of air.
3. Do not overload the freezer. A safe rule is to limit the load to one pint for each cubic foot of space. For example, eight pints would be enough to freeze properly in an eight cubic foot box. In general, most materials should be frozen solidly within 24 hours.
4. Check freezer temperature periodically with a standard thermometer. Maintain a constant storage temperature of  $0^{\circ}$  F. to  $-5^{\circ}$  F.

### **PREPARATION FOR SERVING**

Most precooked frozen foods can be reheated in the oven in a covered casserole or on top of the range.

When reheating on top of the range, use a double boiler or heavy skillet or saucepan.

Whenever possible, bake or reheat food without thawing. Large pieces of meat or deep casseroles, of course, must be thawed. It is usually best to thaw in the refrigerator. Thawing at room temperature can cause dangerous spoilage if it takes more than 3 to 4 hours.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FREEZING

### Yeast Breads

For best results, freeze freshly baked bread or rolls as soon as they have cooled to room temperature. Plain yeast breads can be stored for as long as 11 months whereas products such as pecan rolls can be kept for about 6 months. Thaw in original wrappings at room temperature or reheat in 300° oven for a few minutes. Frozen slices of bread may be toasted without thawing.

### Quick Breads

There seems to be little advantage in freezing quick breads. It is more convenient to use prepared mixes. Loaf breads freeze well after they are baked.

### Cakes

Cakes are generally better if baked before freezing. Angel food, chiffon, sponge, butter, pound, and fruit cakes freeze satisfactorily. Use a standard recipe, bake as directed, cool, and freeze immediately. Thaw in original wrapping at room temperature. If cake is frosted or filled, thaw it in the refrigerator. A two-layer, 9-inch cake will thaw in about 2 hours at room temperature.

Frosted cakes are handled more easily if they are frozen before wrapping, and if they are unwrapped before thawing.

Frostings which freeze successfully include the uncooked type made from confectioner's sugar and the candy type containing corn syrup. Boiled icings, 7-minute icings, and custard fillings do not freeze satisfactorily.

### Cookies

Cookies freeze well, baked or unbaked. Cool baked cookies thoroughly before packaging for the freezer.

Thaw baked cookies in wrappings for a few minutes at room temperature if desired. Thin cookies do not require thawing.

Cookie dough is easier to package and takes less freezer space than baked cookies. Mold ice box cookies into a roll, package, and freeze. Slice and bake as soon as it comes from the freezer. Pack drop cookie dough in freezer containers, seal, and freeze. Thaw dough at room temperature until it can be handled easily and then drop by spoonfuls on cookie sheets and bake as directed. Cookies can be stored from 6 to 12 months.

### Pies

Although fruit pies can be frozen before or after baking, it is preferable to bake them after freezing since the bottom crust is less apt to be soggy. When using light-colored fruits such as apples and peaches, mix 1/8 teaspoon of ascorbic acid crystals with the sugar before adding to the fruit for one pie. If ascorbic acid is not available, 2 teaspoons of lemon juice will give some protection against discoloration. Do not cut slits in the top crust of fruit pies which are to be frozen before baking. Bake pies from the frozen state. Cut holes in the upper crust before baking. Bake in a hot oven (450°) for 15 to 20 minutes, and then at 350° to complete cooking, or at 400° for the length of time needed to brown the crust and cook the fruit. Mince pies, deep dish pies, and chiffon pies freeze well. Cream pies, custard pies, and meringues do not freeze satisfactorily.

Pastry may be frozen either baked or unbaked. Use a standard recipe. Prepare crusts as usual. Circles of rolled crust may be separated with 2 pieces of wax paper before packaging. When needed, thaw, and handle as freshly prepared dough. Baked pie shells can be frozen. To prevent crushing, package in pie tin. Remove from freezer, freshen by heating in 425° oven for 5 minutes, add filling, and serve. Graham cracker crusts also freeze well.

### Sandwiches

The following sandwich fillings freeze well: luncheon meats, left-over sliced roast meat or poultry, dried beef, tuna, salmon, sliced cheese, cheese spreads, hard-cooked egg yolks, and peanut butter. Use them separately or combine with very small amounts of salad

dressing, cream cheese, or creamed butter to make spreading easy. Add sliced or chopped olives and chopped dill or sweet pickles to any of these. If desired, fillings and spreads may be frozen separately in frozen food containers for later use.

Not all sandwich spreads freeze satisfactorily. Jelly, jam, mayonnaise, and salad dressing soak into the bread. Hard cooked egg white toughens and develops off-flavors. Do not use lettuce, celery, tomatoes, and carrots. These can be added to the sandwich after it has been taken from the freezer.

When preparing sandwiches, use slices of fresh or frozen bread. Spread both sides lightly with butter to prevent soaking. Wrap lunch sandwiches separately in good wrapping material.

Fancy party sandwiches and hors d'oeuvres can also be frozen and the rules for making, packaging, and freezing and storing are the same. Pack party sandwiches in layers with two sheets of waxed paper in between. Place the sandwiches in containers for protection from crushing. Label and date. The storage life for most sandwiches is about three weeks. Do not refreeze sandwiches.

## Meals

It is almost impossible to package a plate of pre-cooked food for freezing without leaving air spaces. Unless packed tightly, frozen precooked foods will lose palatability rapidly. Results are better if individual portions are packaged.

To avoid spoilage, cool all meat dishes to 130°, package and freeze at once. Leave roasts in as large pieces as possible. Coat slices with sauce or gravy to exclude air, package, and freeze immediately. Meat dishes containing gravy such as swiss steak, meat balls and gravy, fricasses, stews, veal birds, etc., freeze well. Frozen leftover chicken and turkey, packed without gravy, are excellent served cold. Dressing should be packed separately from meat.

## RECIPES YOU MIGHT TRY...

### Individual Chicken Pies

(8 servings)

3-4 cups	chicken, cooked
3 tablespoons	butter
¼ cup	flour
1 pint	chicken stock

[ 8 ]

¼ cup	light cream
1 teaspoon	salt
Dash	pepper
1 cup	fresh carrots, diced, cooked
1 cup	peas, frozen uncooked, or fresh blanched

1. Melt butter over low heat in heavy saucepan.
2. Blend in flour; stirring until smooth.
3. Add next four ingredients; cook over medium heat, stirring until thickened. Beat smooth if necessary. Set aside.
4. Boil diced carrots in salted water until just tender; drain.
5. Pour gravy into 8 aluminum foil containers or individual casseroles to cover bottom. Add chicken, frozen uncooked peas, and carrots to each individual baking dish. Cover chicken and vegetables with remaining gravy. Cool; top with rounds of pastry (unslashed), seal edges with a fork; wrap and freeze. *To serve:* remove from freezer and thaw at room temperature 1 hour. Uncover pies and place on cookie sheet. Cut slashes; bake at 350° F. 30-40 minutes. Carrots and peas may be omitted if desired.

### Swiss Steak

(6 servings)

2 pounds	round or shoulder arm steak (1½-2" thick)
½ cup	flour
2 teaspoons	salt
⅛ teaspoon	pepper
3 tablespoons	shortening
1 cup	onions, chopped
2½ cups	water or tomato juice or
1 No. 2 can	tomatoes

Pound flour, salt, and pepper into steak. Melt shortening in a heavy skillet and brown the steak on both sides. Add ½ cup of the water or tomatoes, cover tightly, and place in a slow oven (300°) for about 1½ hours, or until very tender. Add remaining water or juice gradually to prevent skillet from going dry. If preferred, cooking may be finished on top of stove over low heat, rather than in the oven. Serve meat in its own gravy.

*To freeze:* Cool rapidly, package in an aluminum foil pie pan or pie or cake pan close to the size of your skillet. Make sure is well covered with gravy. Cover with foil or other freezer material and freeze.

[ 9 ]

## Meat Balls and Cream Gravy

(6 servings)

### Meat balls

1	tablespoon	butter
1/3	cup	onion, minced
1		egg
1/3	cup	milk
1/2	cup	soft bread crumbs
1	teaspoon	salt
1/8	teaspoon	pepper
1	pound	ground beef

1. Sauté onions in hot butter until golden brown.
2. In a large mixing bowl, beat egg. Add milk, crumbs and seasonings. Add meat and blend well with fork. Do not overmix.
3. Shape into small balls about 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter. Brown meat balls in about 2 tablespoons of fat in a skillet. Cover and cook over low heat until done. Remove to a warm casserole.

### Cream gravy

3	tablespoons	flour
1	cup	water
1/2	cup	light cream
1		beef bouillon cube
1/4	teaspoon	salt
	Dash	pepper

1. Into fat left in skillet, stir flour; brown slightly. Add water and cream. Stir until thickened. Add beef bouillon cube, salt, and pepper.
2. If desired, return meat balls to gravy; heat well. Or serve meat balls in covered casserole and pass gravy.

*To freeze:* Cool meat balls. Chill gravy by placing pan in ice water. Arrange meat balls and gravy in pie or cake pan or aluminum foil pie pan close to size of your skillet. Make sure meat balls are well covered with gravy. Cover with foil or other freezer material. Freeze.

## Tamale Casserole

(8 to 10 servings)

### Topping

3/4	cup	yellow cornmeal
1 1/4	teaspoons	salt
1	cup	cold water
2	cups	boiling water

### Filling

1 1/2	pounds	ground beef
1	tablespoon	oil or fat
1	cup	chopped onions
2 1/4	teaspoons	salt
4	teaspoons	chili powder
1	No. 2 can (2 1/2 cups)	tomatoes
1	cup (3 1/2 oz. can)	pitted ripe olives*, sliced
1	cup	grated American cheese

1. Combine cornmeal, salt, and cold water. Add slowly to boiling water. Cook slowly to a mush. Keep mush warm while preparing meat filling.
2. Brown ground meat and onions in large skillet. Add salt. Add canned tomatoes, chili powder and simmer 20 minutes. Add sliced olives. Cool. Spread meat mixture in baking dish about 10" x 15". Cool. Top with layer of cornmeal mush. Cool, package, and freeze.
3. Remove from freezer, bake unthawed in moderate oven (350°) 45 minutes to 1 hour. Sprinkle with grated cheese last 15 minutes of baking.

\*Ripe olives may be omitted if desired.

## Frozen Fruit Salad

(8 servings)

1	teaspoon	gelatine, unflavored
2	tablespoons	lemon juice
1	3 oz. package	cream cheese, softened
1/4	cup	mayonnaise
1/4	teaspoon	salt
2	tablespoons	sugar
1/2	cup	heavy cream, whipped
1/4	cup	chopped nuts
1/4	cup	Maraschino cherries, quartered
1	No. 2 can	crushed pineapple, drained
	or	
1	No. 303 can	fruit cocktail, drained
	or	
1 3/4	cups	mixed sliced fresh fruit

1. Turn refrigerator to coldest setting.
2. Soften gelatine in lemon juice in glass measuring cup. Set cup in pan of boiling water stirring occasionally until gelatine dissolves.
3. Add to combined cheese, mayonnaise, salt, and sugar.
4. Fold in rest of ingredients.
5. Pour into ice cube tray, wrap, and freeze. Slice and serve on crisp greens.

## Pineapple Freeze

(4 to 5 servings)

2		egg whites
Dash		salt
1/4	cup	sugar
1	No. 1 flat can (9 oz.)	crushed pineapple

1. Beat egg whites with salt to soft peak stage.
2. Add sugar gradually and continue beating until stiff peaks form.
3. Fold in undrained pineapple. (One 9 oz. can contains about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup drained fruit and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup juice.)
4. Pack into freezer tray or other container, cover with foil, and freeze.
5. Pile lightly into dessert dishes and serve immediately.

## Chocolate Mousse

(8 to 10 servings)

$\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon	gelatine
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup	cold milk
$1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ squares)	chocolate
or	
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup	cocoa
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup	milk
$\frac{2}{3}$ cup	sugar
2 teaspoons	vanilla
2 cups	heavy cream, whipped

1. Put the gelatine in a small bowl; pour in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cold milk; let stand for five minutes.
2. Put the chocolate and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk in the top part of a double boiler; heat over hot water. When the chocolate is melted, beat vigorously until smooth.
3. Stir in the soaked gelatine and the sugar; stir until the sugar and gelatine are dissolved; cool. If cocoa is used, mix it with the sugar.
4. When the mixture begins to thicken, fold it into the whipped cream; add vanilla.
5. Pour into a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  quart mold. Cover tightly with aluminum foil or other pliable wrapping material. Freeze.
6. *To unmold*—Remove the cover from the frozen mixture; invert on a serving dish; cover with a cloth wrung out of hot water. After about 1 minute, lift the edge of the mold slightly to see whether the mixture has melted enough around the edges to allow the mold to be lifted off. If not, try again in another minute. Serve small servings of this rich dessert.