

Freeze Now Eat Later: Freeze Now, Before the Fresh Peas, Squash and Tomatoes are Gone

Tallahassee Democrat

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As we move from summer to fall, we will have our last chances to enjoy fresh vegetables grown in South Georgia and North Florida. Some of the “fall” vegetables you might enjoy this month are cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, eggplant, peas and butter beans. If you and your family love fresh vegetables and would like to enjoy them this winter then freezing them for later use would be the easiest way to enjoy them in the months to come. Gather your plastic freezer containers or your freezer bags and get ready to start the process.

Whenever possible, harvest vegetables in the cool part of the morning and freeze them within a few hours. Vegetables need to be washed thoroughly in cold water, lifting them out as grit settles to the bottom of the washing container. As you wash your vegetables you can sort them according to size for blanching and packaging. You may be wondering why is blanching important. Blanching is a process where you scald fresh produce in boiling water or steam for a short period of time. Blanching slows down the action of enzymes that can cause loss of flavor, color and texture. Blanching also cleanses the surface of dirt and organisms, brightens the color and helps retard loss of vitamins. Blanching time is crucial and varies with the vegetable and its size.

For home freezing, the most satisfactory way to heat all vegetables for blanching is in boiling water. Use one gallon of water per pound of prepared vegetables. Put the vegetables in a blanching basket and lower into rapidly boiling water. Place a lid on the blancher and start counting the blanching time as soon as the water returns to a boil. As soon as you finish blanching the vegetables cool vegetables quickly and thoroughly to stop the cooking process. You can cool the vegetables using a quantity of cold water 60°F or below. Change water frequently or use cold running water or iced water. If ice is used, have about one pound of ice for each pound of vegetables. Cooling vegetables should take the same amount of time as blanching.

There are two basic packing methods for freezing vegetables. The first is a dry pack where you place the blanched and drained vegetables into meal sized freezer containers or freezer bags. Pack tightly to cut down on the amount of air in the package. Leave ½ inch space at the top of rigid containers. For freezer bags, fill to within three inches of the top. The second packing method is a tray pack. Place chilled, well drained vegetables in a single layer on a shallow pan or tray. Place in freezer until firm, then remove quickly and quickly fill bags or containers. Close and freeze immediately. Tray packed foods do not freeze in a block and therefore can be used as needed.

For specific blanching times on different vegetables you can go to www.homefoodpreservation.com or contact Christa Campbell and our office will mail you a copy of the publication “Freezing Vegetables”. You can contact Christa Campbell by, writing to County Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Science, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension – Brooks County, 400 E. Courtland Avenue, Quitman, GA 31643; or call the Extension Office (229)263-4103, between 8a.m. to 5p.m. weekdays.

Finally, label your packages with the name of the product and the freezing date. Freeze at once at 0°F or lower. Most vegetables maintain high quality for 8-12 months at 0°F or lower. Longer storage will not make food unfit for use, but may impair the quality. I hope this information will help you and your family enjoy a touch of summer this winter.