

Save Time At Holidays – Freeze Dishes Now

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Well, the rush is on. Holiday shopping, office parties, family gatherings . . . and cooking! As a youngster I didn't have any idea how difficult it must have been for my Mom to juggle the demands of feeding a large family, entertaining an even larger extended family, while taking the time to make food gift trays for elderly in our church or shut-ins in our small town. After raising a family of my own, I've come to understand how intimidating the thought of holiday food preparation can be! So now that we're on the countdown to holiday season, let me share some easy freezing tips for those family favorites to take off some of holiday pressure!

❖ General tips:

- Slightly undercook prepared foods that will be reheated to help avoid overcooking. This is especially important for dishes containing some type of pasta.
- Cool foods quickly for safety. Cool hot prepared foods such as main dishes and sauces quickly in their original pan placed in a large pan, in a sink filled with ice water. Keep foods covered to prevent contamination and loss of aroma and moisture. Add ice frequently. You can also place the cooked item, in a room temp shallow dish, directly into the refrigerator to cool.
- Prepared food may be frozen directly in the casserole or baking dish. If the dish has a cover, it can be used. However, it's important to first put a layer of plastic wrap directly on the food surface to prevent moisture loss and seal the edges with freezer tape.
- Straight-sided dishes can be freed for other uses by lining them with heavy-duty foil before filling. After the product has been prepared, remove it from the dish by transferring the foil lining. Finish wrapping and freeze. Use the same dish to later reheat and serve the food.
- Cold glass dishes may break if put into a preheated oven unless the dish is freezer to oven safe – check the dish underside for this information.
- Cheese and crumb toppings for casseroles should be added when the dish is being heated to serve. If put on before freezing, these toppings become soggy or dry.
- When reheating, use the oven setting at which the dish was originally cooked. Start with less than double the original cooking time (i.e. casserole originally cooked for 30 minutes; start with reheating for about 50 minutes).

❖ Product specific tips:

- Quick breads – prepare and bake as usual. Cool thoroughly, package and freeze. Slice fruit and nut breads while still partially frozen to avoid crumbling.
- Muffins - prepare and bake as usual. Cool thoroughly, package and freeze. Frozen unbaked muffins have a poor texture when baked.
- Breads, coffeecake, rolls (baked) - prepare and bake as usual. Cool thoroughly, package and freeze.
- Bread, coffeecake, rolls (unbaked) – use only recipes developed especially for freezing unbaked dough. Follow recipe directions.
- Brown and serve rolls – Prepare as usual, but let rise slightly less after shaping. Bake at 275°F for 20 minutes. Do not brown. Cool, package and freeze. Thaw and bake at 425°F for 5 to 10 minutes or until light brown.
- Cakes (baked) – Prepare as usual, bake and cool. Freeze portion size as desired. To prevent crushing, freeze whole cakes in boxes. For best results freeze cake and frosting separately; frosted cakes should be quick frozen on a tray before packaging. Best frostings for freezing include fudge frosting or powdered sugar icing. Do not freeze seven minute frosting or those made with egg whites.
- Cookies (baked) – prepare as usual. Cool, package with freezer paper between layers, and freeze.
- Cookies (unbaked) – prepare as usual, form into roll, package, seal and freeze. Slice and bake without thawing according to recipe. For bulk cookie dough: prepare dough as usual, package, seal and freeze. Thaw dough until soft enough to drop by teaspoons, bake according to recipe.
- Cream puffs, éclair shells – prepare as usual, cool. Slit and remove moist inside dough. Do not fill before freezing. Tray freeze, then package and freeze. Thaw, and then fill for serving.
- Unbaked pie pastry – prepare as usual, fit into pie pan. You can stack pie pans with a double layer of freezer paper between them. Or store flat rounds of pastry on foil-covered cardboard separated by two layers of freezer paper. Over wrap either method with freezer bags or heavy-duty foil, seal and freeze.

- Baked pie pastry – prepare and bake pastry as usual. Cool, package and freeze.
- Chiffon pie – prepare with a gelatin base. Tray freeze before packing to keep the top from sticking to freezer wrap. Package and freeze. Thaw in refrigerator, add meringue topping just before serving. Frozen meringue toppings are tough.
- Fruit, mince, and nut pies (unbaked) – frozen unbaked pies have a better flavor than frozen baked pies, but the bottom crust tends to get soggy. Thicken fruit fillings with instant tapioca and cool before pouring into crust. The filling for frozen pies should be slightly thicker and usual. Do not cut vents in top crust. Tray freeze, package and return to freezer. Bake unthawed, vent holes in upper crust, bake on baking sheet at 450°F for 15 minutes, then reduce heat to 375°F for 20 to 30 minutes or until top is lightly brown.
- Fruit, mince, and nut pies (baked) – prepare as usual, cool rapidly, tray freeze, package and return to freezer. Thaw at room temperature for 15 minutes. Then bake at 350°F about 30 minutes until warm.
- Fruit pie fillings – freeze separately in rigid containers, leaving ½ inch headspace.
- Candies – Fudge, divinity, brittle, taffy, creams and caramels may be frozen. Prepare as usual, wrap each piece individually in plastic wrap and package in rigid containers to avoid crushing. Don't freeze chocolate covered cherries because they expand and break. Also the fat “bloom” which may appear on the surface of chocolate during freezing, should disappear when candies are thawed.
- Cheesecake (baked) – prepare as usual, bake and cool. Tray freeze, wrap and refreeze in rigid containers to prevent crushing.
- Meringues, puddings, creams, custards, mousses, and whips don't freeze well – most break down, some weep, and they all lose their textures when thawed.
- Casseroles containing meat – prepare as usual, keeping fat to a minimum (freezing makes fatty foods have an off-flavor). Omit potatoes and slightly undercook other veggies. Cool rapidly, package, leave headspace and freeze. Be sure meat is covered with sauce or broth. Thaw partially in refrigerator to prevent overcooking.
- Non-meat casseroles – prepare as usual. Pasta should be slightly undercooked. Cool rapidly, package, leave headspace and freeze. Thaw partially in refrigerator to prevent overcooking.
- Dressing – prepare as usual, cool rapidly, package and freeze. Thaw partially in refrigerator to prevent overcooking.
- Soups - prepare as usual; concentrate by using less liquid if possible. Omit potatoes. Cool rapidly, package, leave headspace and freeze. When reheating, add liquid as needed.
- Potatoes (baked or stuffed) – prepare as usual. Cool and wrap individually in foil. Over wrap in freezer bags.
- Potatoes (scaloped) – prepare as usual and bake until almost tender. Leave in baking dish and cool rapidly. Package and freeze. When reheating, add extra milk if needed.
- Salads with base of whipped cream, cottage cheese or mayonnaise – prepare as usual and pour into desired serving dish. Cover top with freezer paper and over wrap in freezer paper or heavy-duty foil. Keep in mind many of these types of foods may “weep” when defrosted.
- Gelatin-based salads – experiment with freezing these types of recipes BEFORE planning to serve to company. These are very difficult to produce a good frozen product. Use only ¾ of the total liquid called for in the recipe. Whipped cream, cottage cheese, softened cream cheese or mayonnaise can be added to improve the texture of the frozen gelatin salad. Line a square pan with plastic wrap and pour 1/3 of the syrupy gelatin. Put in freezer for a short period to set up slightly. Pour remaining gelatin over the frozen first layer. Freeze. Remove from dish, complete wrapping with freezer wrap or heavy duty foil. Return to freezer. Plain gelatin shouldn't be frozen as is toughens and “weeps” when thawed.

Contact your local University of Missouri Extension center at 816.380.8460 for a free copy of GH1055 for more information on freezing home-prepared foods. You may also download a copy at www.extension.missouri.edu or contact this faculty member directly at mills-grays@missouri.edu