

News Column – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – Cottonwood District

Prepping Vegetables for Freezing

If your garden is producing more fresh vegetables than you can work in to the daily menu plan you may want to consider freezing. Most vegetables need to be blanched before freezing to inactivate enzymes and protect their quality. This is done by water or steam blanching. Enzymes are a natural component of food. They work inside food and can change flavor, texture, color and nutrition. Blanching stops enzymes and protects the food from quality changes.

Occasionally I will get a call from someone who asks if blanching can be done in the microwave? Using the microwave may produce poor results. Due to uneven heating, the microwave may not completely inactivate enzymes. This results in off flavors, poor texture and loss of color. The microwave does not save time or energy.

To blanch vegetables correctly, briefly expose them to boiling water or steam. Then cool rapidly in ice water to stop cooking. Blanching destroys microorganisms on the vegetable surface and is essential for top-quality frozen vegetables.

For products like tomatoes you will notice that they will have a mushy texture when thawed and are suitable only for cooking in soups, stews and sauces. Tomatoes that are frozen raw become watery and can develop an off-flavor after a short time in the freezer. Tomatoes that are too ripe for safe canning but still sound and free from decay can be frozen safely.

If you are wanting to freeze sweet corn, it is important to preserve it as soon after harvest as possible for best quality. To prepare corn-on-the-cob for freezing: Blanch small ears (1 ¼ inches or less in diameter) 7 minutes in boiling water; medium-size ears (1 ¼ to 1 ½ inches) 9 minutes; and large ears (1 ½ inches or more) 11 minutes. Cool in several changes of ice cold water and drain. If desired, cut ears into uniform 4-, 6-, or 8-inch pieces and package in freezer bags or containers.

Be aware there is a significant difference between a plastic storage bag and plastic freezer bags. Make sure you are using the heavier freezer bags for best results.

Excellent reference bulletins for a variety of vegetables and fruits are available at:

www.rrc.k-state.edu/preservation/freezing.html

A little work now to preserve the harvest will certainly be enjoyed and appreciated next winter! Call me if you have any questions.

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