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## Freeze Now and Cook Later

The wonderful cooks in Rains County are certainly busy! I've received several calls the past few days about freezing particular vegetables. This is a cost-saving approach to enjoying fresh vegetables this winter. Different vegetables require different techniques, so I've include some that I get the most questions about.

### **Bell Peppers**

1. Wash either green, red, yellow, or orange peppers.
2. Cut peppers in half and remove stem, seeds, and membrane. (a melon baller works great to scrape out the inside.)
3. Cut peppers into slices, strips, or dice them.
4. Arrange the peppers in a single layer on a cookie sheet and put it in the freezer for an hour or longer.
5. Once they are frozen, transfer them into a freezer bag. Try to remove as much air as possible from the bag and return to the freezer.
6. Use as necessary for your recipes. Best used within 8 months for best quality.

### **Zucchini**

1. Wash zucchini under running water.
2. Cut away any bad or blemished spots and the stem section.
3. Cut into approximately ½ inch slices.
4. Water blanch approximately 3 minutes.
5. After removing the zucchini from the water, let it drain and cool.
6. Place in a freezer bag, leaving ½ inch headspace. Seal and freeze.

### **Onions**

1. Wash the onion under running water and peel. Then either cut them into 1/2 inch slices or dice them.
2. Arrange the onions in a single layer on a cookie sheet and put it in the freezer for an hour or longer.
3. Once they are frozen, transfer them into a freezer bag. Try to remove as much air as possible from the bag and return to the freezer.
4. Use as necessary for your recipes. Best used within 8 months for best quality.

## Tomatoes

Freezing causes the texture of a tomato to become mushy when it is thawed. So frozen tomatoes are best for use in soups, stews, and sauces. Do not substitute them for fresh tomatoes, they must be cooked.

1. Wash tomatoes under running water.
2. Cut away any bad or blemished spots and the stem section.
3. To freeze whole tomatoes, place them on a cookie sheet and freeze for 1 – 2 hours. Then transfer the tomatoes into a freezer bag or container and seal tightly. When you are ready to use them remove the tomatoes from the freezer. To remove the skin, run warm water over it and the skin will easily slip off.
4. To freeze peeled tomatoes, do steps 1 and 2. Then dip them into boiling water for approximately 1 minute or until the skins split open. Remove the peels then transfer the tomatoes into a freezer bag or container and seal tightly.
5. Use as necessary for your recipes. Best used within 8 months for best quality.

These are just a few of the many wonderful vegetables that are in season. For more information on freezing other fruits and vegetables, please contact the Texas AgriLife Extension Service office at 903/473-5000, ext. 157.

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