Preserve It Fresh, Preserve It Safe

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Freezing Soups

Soups and stews are great prepare-ahead foods to freeze and enjoy at a later time when you need a quick meal. While freezing is convenient, there are a few things to keep in mind:

Recipe. Freezing will not improve the texture, flavor or quality of food. It simply preserves existing food quality by stopping microbial growth. Which brings us to the question: "Will all soups freeze satisfactorily to assure a good product later?" Most soup recipes can be frozen, but you should check the National Center for Home Food Preservation for ingredients that do not freeze successfully. Vegetable and meat-based soups generally freeze very well; however, potatoes and pasta may need special consideration. "Joy of Cooking" advises adding freshly cooked potatoes or pasta just before serving if a soup or chowder calls for those ingredients, or undercooking the potatoes or pasta if they're to be part of a soup that will be frozen. Dairy-based soups and chowders can be frozen, too, but the outcome is not always predictable, as they tend to separate slightly when thawed and reheated. This typically can be fixed by whisking in a little additional milk or cream, or by stabilizing the cream with a mixture of arrowroot or potato powder and water. Try using an immersion blender to mix together a dairy-based soup that has separated. You also can use a modified starch suitable for low temperatures, such as ThermFlo or tapioca flour, to help prevent separation of a thickened soup; "Joy of Cooking" suggests substituting 1 tablespoon of tapioca flour for 2½ tablespoons of all-purpose flour per 1 cup of liquid.

Cooling. After preparing your soup, it must be cooled quickly to prevent a foodborne illness. Best practices include transferring the soup into shallow pans, dividing it into smaller batches and stirring to speed cooling. Regardless of the method you use, it's most important to get the soup cooled as quickly as possible.

Packaging. Once the soup is cool, how you intend to use it will dictate your packaging. If you want to freeze a large quantity and need to save space, try laying the soup flat in zip-lock freezer bags and stacking the bags once they are frozen. Solid freezer containers also work well. For individual servings, smaller freezer bags can be used; ½–1 cup is considered a snack-size portion, and 2 cups is a meal portion.

Freezing. Always remove as much air as possible as you close the bag or container, and leave ½ inch of headspace for pint-sized containers and 1 inch of headspace for quart-sized containers. Clearly label each package with the name of the food, ingredients, packaging date and any special instructions. Prepared containers should be placed in the coldest part of the freezer, allowing for good air circulation around each container. After the product is fully frozen, stack to save space. Soups containing starches or starchy vegetables should be placed in the back of the freezer—where the temperature remains more constant—to prevent any slight thawing that

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would allow starchy ingredients to absorb moisture and become mushy.

Defrosting and reheating. To retain the best flavor, dairy-based soups should be consumed within two months of freezing, and broth-based soups within three months. Soups kept longer than these suggested time frames are still safe to eat, but the flavor begins to fade and freezer burn starts to set in. Soups should be thawed in the refrigerator overnight; if a soup is defrosted in the microwave oven, it should be heated and eaten immediately.

Source: Adapted by permission from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. AnswerLine. 2016. Successfully freezing homemade soup. October 24. https://blogs.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/2016/10/24/successfully-freezing-homemade-soup/.

Selling Frozen Produce

In addition to selling jams, jellies and other canned foods, it is possible to sell frozen produce directly to the consumer through farmers markets, farm stands, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program or similar settings. However, it is important to use good food safety practices and follow your local regulations. In Kansas, producers can sell many frozen fruits and some vegetables without a license—meaning they can be produced in your home kitchen—if they are sold directly to the consumer. The only frozen products sold directly to consumers that call for a Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) food establishment license, which would require you to use a kitchen other than your home kitchen to pass inspection, are frozen cut/chopped tomatoes, melons, leafy greens and any product that is blanched before freezing. If the product is not blanched before freezing (which is more common with fruits) or one of the aforementioned items, you do not need a license. If you are selling frozen produce to a grocery store, distributor, school, or restaurant, you will need a KDA food processor license. More information on KS regulations is available at www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3138.pdf.

In Missouri, many cities and counties have their own food ordinances, so they may have stricter requirements than at the state level. So it is best to check with your local public health department to determine the current regulations in the area in which you are producing, as well as for the area where you are selling the product. At the state level, whole frozen produce does not require inspection when it's sold directly to the consumer. However, it does require inspection if you are chopping the produce before freezing it. More information on food regulations in Missouri is available at http://health.mo.gov/safety/foodsafety/industryfoods/. Resources on food labeling, selling canned foods, Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and related Missouri food sales topics are available at http://missourifamilies.org/foodsafety/newsletters/.

Check Your Stash

Now that canning season has slowed, it is a good idea to check the pantry to see if your canned goods are still in good shape, with no signs of spoilage. Here are some tips:

- You don't need to keep ring bands on the jars during storage. In fact, removing them will help you easily detect some types of spoilage.
- Look for lids that have become unsealed. Do not use any jars of food with unsealed lids.
- If your jars are stacked directly on top of each other, be careful to not disturb the vacuum seals. Do not stack jars more than two jars high, and put some type of supportive layer between them for stability.
- Examine the outside jar surface for food streaks starting at the top of the jar.
- Look for air bubbles moving on their own inside the jar.
- Examine the jars for any unnatural color changes.
- When you open the jar, smell the food for unnatural odors, spurting liquid or mold growth.

Any canned foods, both home-canned and commercially canned, are best stored in a cool, dry and dark location. The ideal storage temperature is between 50 and 70 degrees F. Avoid locations such as the garage, furnace room, on top of the clothes dryer, under the sink or in direct sunlight. Temperature fluctuations, light and high humidity can cause changes in food that could lead to spoilage.

See http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/store/store_home_canned.html for more information on storing preserved foods and handling spoiled foods.

Local Contact Information:

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