



**Seattle  
Public  
Utilities**

How to make food  
last longer by freezing it



## **Freezer Storage Guide**



Using your freezer is a great way to reduce food waste. It will also make cooking easier since you'll have food ready when you need it.

This guide is an introduction to basic freezing methods that will work for most foods.





## Tips to keep in mind when freezing food

- Keep your freezer temperature at 0°F or lower.
- Freeze food in meal-sized portions.
- Prevent freezer burn by keeping air away from the food. Remove air from the packaging before freezing. Add an extra layer of packaging for longer storage.
- Label the packaging with the date and contents.
- Recommended storage times are for quality, not safety. The freezer keeps food safe almost indefinitely, but the taste and texture will worsen the longer it is stored.
- Thaw only as much food as you plan to use at one time.
- Only refreeze food that was thawed in the refrigerator. Foods thawed through other methods should not be refrozen unless cooked first.

# Packaging



## Freezer Paper

Use for wrapping meats.

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## Plastic Freezer Wrap

Use for wrapping meats and breads.

Only use plastic wrap made for the freezer.

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## Heavy-Duty Aluminum Foil

Use as second layer of wrap, over freezer paper or plastic freezer wrap.

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## Freezer Bag

Use for fruits, vegetables, herbs, breads, and leftovers. Can also be used as a second layer of wrap for meats. Only use bags made for the freezer.

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## Airtight Freezer-Safe Container

Use for fruits, vegetables, herbs and leftovers. Can also be used as a second layer of protection for meats and breads. Only use freezer-safe containers.

# How to Thaw

## Refrigerator

Best choice for fruits, vegetables, meats, and leftovers. Keep the food wrapped or covered, and place on a plate in the fridge. The fridge temperature should be 40°F or lower. Most foods thaw in a day or two.

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## Cold Water

Quick thaw option. Place the food in a leak-proof bag or container. Soak in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes until thawed. Cook immediately after thawing.

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## Microwave

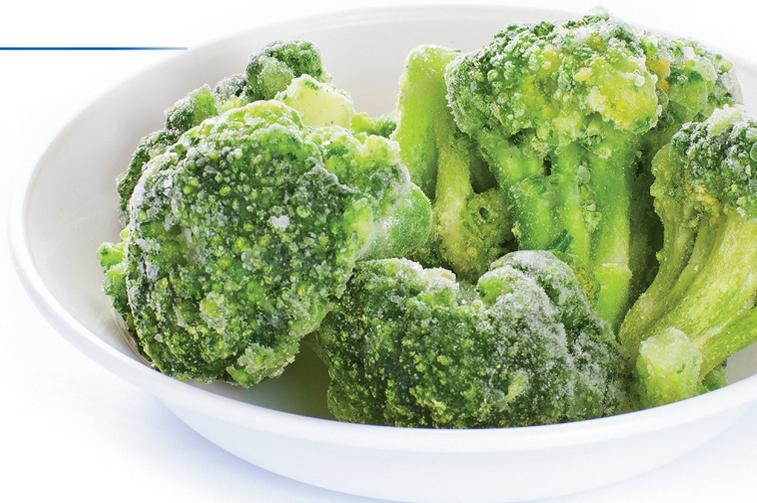
Quick thaw option. Place the food in a microwave-safe dish and set the microwave to defrost. Parts of the food may begin to cook while defrosting. Cook immediately after thawing.

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## Room Temperature

Best choice for bread. Keep the bread wrapped and place it on the counter. Slices thaw in about 10 minutes, and whole loaves in 3-5 hours. Do not thaw other foods at room temperature.

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# Fruits

Frozen fruit is best used in smoothies, desserts, and baking. Citrus and pears do not freeze well using this method.

## **Freezing Instructions**

1. Wash the fruit.
2. Remove the inedible parts and place in your food waste container.
3. Chop larger fruit into slices or bite-sized pieces.
4. Pat the fruit dry to remove moisture.
5. Spread in a single layer on a tray or plate, and place in the freezer until frozen. This step is optional, but it will help prevent fruit from clumping together.
6. Once frozen, move the fruit to a freezer bag or freezer-safe container. Double-bag for longer storage. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.
7. Label with the date and contents.
8. For best quality, use within 8-12 months.
9. Thaw in the refrigerator, cold water, or microwave. You can also use frozen fruit without thawing.



# Vegetables



Frozen vegetables are best used for cooking.  
Lettuce, cucumbers, and radishes do not freeze well.

## Freezing Instructions

1. Wash the vegetables.
2. Remove the inedible parts and place in your food waste container.
3. Chop the vegetables to cooking size.
4. Blanch the vegetables by briefly boiling in water.
5. Move the vegetables to a bowl of ice cold water to cool.
6. Drain the vegetables and pat dry to remove moisture.
7. Spread in a single layer on a tray or plate, and place in the freezer until frozen. This step is optional, but it will help prevent the vegetables from clumping together.
8. Once frozen, move the vegetables to a freezer bag or freezer-safe container. Double-bag for longer storage. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.
9. Label with the date and contents.
10. For best quality, use within 8-12 months.
11. Thaw in the refrigerator, cold water, or microwave.  
You can also cook frozen vegetables without thawing.



| <b>Vegetable</b>            | <b>Blanching time (minutes)</b> | <b>Cook until tender instead of blanching:</b>     |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Artichoke hearts            | 7                               | Beets  |
| Asparagus                   | 2-4                             | Sweet potatoes                                     |
| Broccoli                    | 3                               | Winter squash                                      |
| Brussel sprouts             | 3-5                             |  |
| Carrots (chopped)           | 2                               | <b>Can be frozen without blanching or cooking:</b> |
| Cauliflower                 | 3                               | Onions (chopped)                                   |
| Corn on the cob             | 7-11                            | Peppers  |
| Eggplant                    | 4                               | Summer squash (shredded)                           |
| Greens (for cooking)        | 2-3                             | Tomatoes   |
| Green beans                 | 3                               |  |
| Mushrooms (steam, not boil) | 3-5                             |  |
| Okra                        | 3-4                             |  |
| Parsnips                    | 2                               |  |
| Peas                        | 1½-2                            |  |
| Potatoes                    | 3-5                             |  |
| Summer squash (chopped)     | 3                               |  |
| Turnips                     | 2                               |  |

# Herbs

Frozen herbs are best used for cooking.

## **Freezing Instructions**

1. Wash the herbs.
2. Pat the herbs dry to remove moisture.
3. Remove the inedible parts and place in your food waste container.
4. Put the herbs into an ice cube tray, filling each cube about two-thirds full.
5. Pour water, broth, melted butter, or olive oil over the herbs, filling each cube.
6. Place the tray in the freezer until the cubes are frozen.
7. Remove the herb cubes from the tray, and place them in a freezer bag or freezer-safe container. Double-bag for longer storage. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.
8. Label with the date and contents.
9. For best quality, use within 6 months.
10. Melt herb cubes into foods, such as sauces and soups.



# Meat, Poultry & Fish

Use all normal safety precautions when handling and preparing meat, poultry, and fish.

## Freezing Instructions

If the meat comes in an unopened vacuum-sealed bag and you plan to thaw and cook it all at once, then skip steps 1-4.

1. Remove from the store packaging.
2. If desired, trim fat and remove bones. Place inedible parts in your food waste container.
3. Separate into meal-sized portions.
4. Wrap each portion tightly in freezer paper or plastic freezer wrap.

If wrapping several pieces in the same packaging, such as burger patties, then place freezer paper or wrap between each piece to prevent them from sticking together.

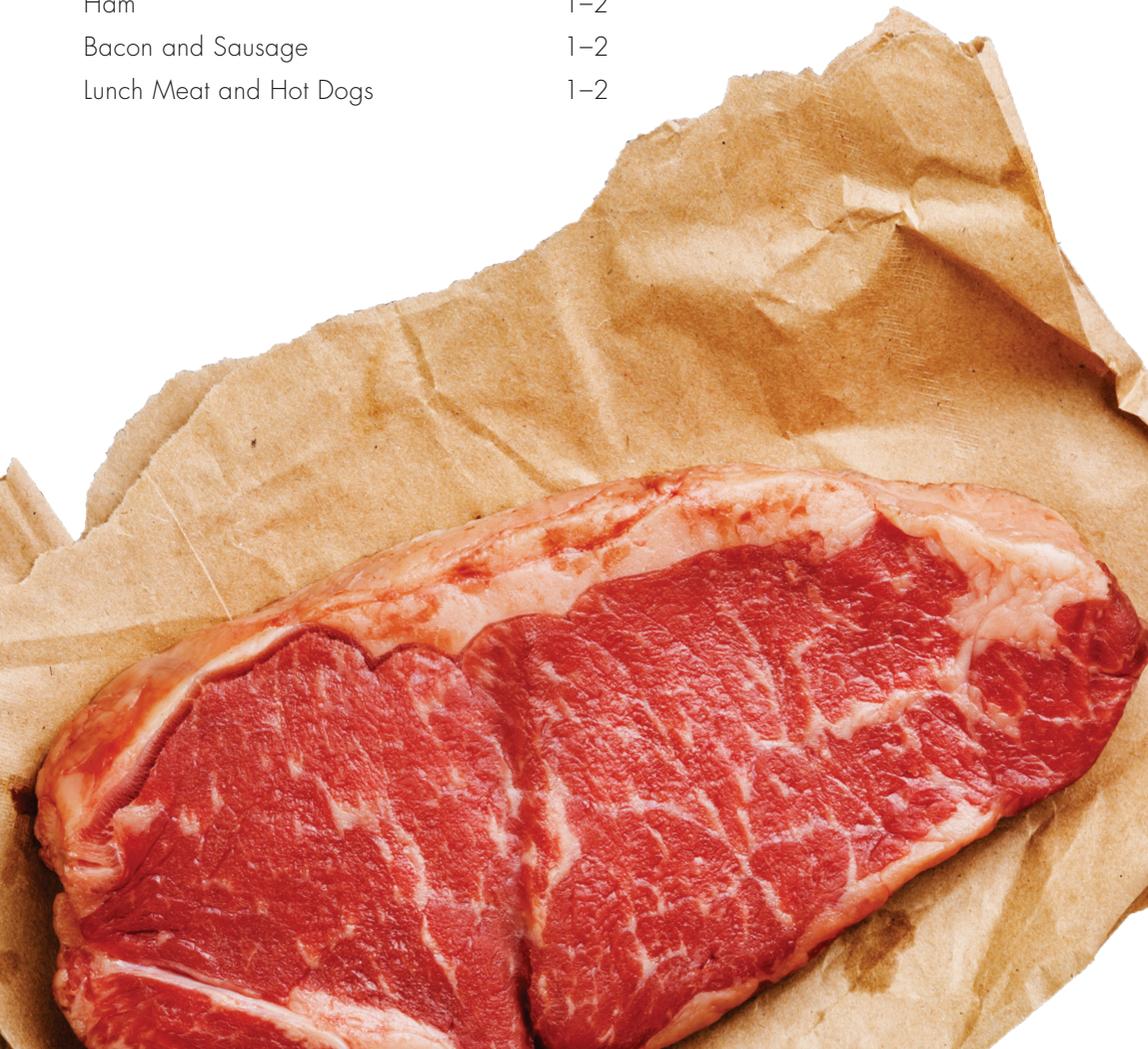
5. Double-wrap for longer storage in freezer paper or heavy-duty aluminum foil, or place in a freezer bag or freezer-safe container. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.
6. Label with the date and contents.
7. For best quality, use within the recommended storage time.
8. Thaw in the refrigerator, cold water, or microwave.



**Food Item****Storage Time (months)**

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|                                 |      |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Fish – Cooked                   | 2–6  |
| Fish (fatty) – Uncooked         | 2–3  |
| Fish (lean) – Uncooked          | 6    |
| Poultry – Cooked                | 4    |
| Poultry – Uncooked              | 9–12 |
| Meat – Cooked                   | 2–3  |
| Ground and Stew Meat – Uncooked | 3–4  |
| Steaks and Roasts – Uncooked    | 8–12 |
| Chops (beef & lamb) – Uncooked  | 9–12 |
| Chops (pork) – Uncooked         | 4    |
| Ham                             | 1–2  |
| Bacon and Sausage               | 1–2  |
| Lunch Meat and Hot Dogs         | 1–2  |



# Bread

Freezing is the best option for storing bread you do not plan to use quickly. The quality of frozen bread is much better than the quality of bread stored in the refrigerator.

## Freezing Instructions

1. Pre-slice the bread to your preferred size. This step is optional, but it will make it easier to thaw just the amount you need later.
2. Wrap the bread in plastic freezer wrap or place in a freezer bag. Double-wrap for longer storage, using a freezer bag, freezer-safe container, or heavy-duty aluminum foil. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.

You can also leave bread in its original plastic packaging if you plan to use it within a few weeks.

3. Label with the date and contents.
4. For best quality, use within 3 months.
5. Thaw at room temperature. You can also toast or bake bread without thawing.





# Leftovers

For a quick and easy meal, freeze your leftovers!

## Freezing Instructions

1. Let the leftovers cool completely.
2. Separate into meal-sized portions.
3. Place leftovers in a freezer-safe container or freezer bag. Double-bag for longer storage. Remove as much air as possible before sealing.
4. Label with the date and contents.
5. For best quality, use within 2-3 months.
6. Thaw in the refrigerator, cold water, or microwave.

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For resources to help you waste less food, visit

[seattle.gov/utilities/stopfoodwaste](https://seattle.gov/utilities/stopfoodwaste)

