

# Summer the Year Round with Frozen Fruits



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FRUITS CAN BE FROZEN and still be as appetizing and tasty as fresh fruit if they are properly selected, prepared, packaged, frozen, stored and thawed. However, if you try to slip by on just *one* step, you can ruin the quality of your fruit. Follow reliable research information given here, and your family and guests will want second, and even third, servings. Too, the nutrients in these fruits will still be there.

## **SELECTING VARIETY**

Some PEACH varieties that freeze well are Coronet, Loring, Blake, Elberta, and Redskin. Select suitable varieties and use correct methods to prevent excessive browning in frozen peaches.

Almost any STRAWBERRY variety gives a satisfactory frozen product. Tennessee Beauty is recommended for North Alabama, Albritton and Headliner for Central and South Alabama, and Dixieland and Pocahontas are recommended for any part of the state.

It may be best to can APPLES and save space in the freezer for other foods. However, some apples freeze well. Select firm-fleshed varieties with good cooking quality. Good apple varieties grown in Alabama are Golden Delicious and St. Clair. Stayman is grown in some parts of North Alabama and is excellent for processing. Often good processing apples such as York, Jonathan, and Winesap, which are grown in other states, are available at curb markets.

WILD BLACKBERRIES freeze very nicely. They are found in many parts of the state.

BLUEBERRIES make excellent frozen products. The Rabbiteye blueberry grows well in Alabama, provided it is planted on a suitable location and given proper care. Rabbiteye varieties recommended for freezing are Tifblue, Homebell, Menditoo, Gardenblue, and Woodard.

The MUSCADINE GRAPE is one of the best native fruits of this state. While varieties vary in quality, most of them are good. Hunt is a leading commercial variety. Other good varieties include Scuppernong, Thomas, Dulcet, Yuga, Creek, and Jumbo.

Alabama-grown WATERMELONS and CANTALOUPEs are generally not high in solids; therefore, when they are thawed, the pulp disintegrates very rapidly. If you freeze them, be sure to add a syrup of sugar and water.

## PICKING

Select fruits that are firm-ripe. They will have the flavor, color, texture, and nutrients that are characteristic of the fruit. Soft peaches, berries, etc., are not good to eat when they are fresh, so naturally they won't be after they have been frozen and thawed. The same is true of underripe fruit.

It's best to pick fruit from the bush or tree so it won't be bruised. Fruits prepared for freezing within 12 hours after picking are better than those kept a longer time.

The Kieffer pear, which is extremely hard, is perhaps the only fruit grown in Alabama that is recommended to be picked when two-thirds to three-fourths full size—when the green of immature fruit gradually fades and the fruit becomes lighter or slightly yellow. It must then be stored one layer deep in a cool (60 to 65 degrees), dry place for 2 weeks. This pear is not frozen often and is a better product if canned.

## PREPARING

Put peaches in a basket or thin cloth bag and immerse them in boiling water for 1 minute to remove skin. Do not put too many in at one time; the boiling water cannot circulate around the peaches, and the skin will not become loose.

Remember, too, you need a firm-ripe peach. Hard ones will “hold” the skin, and overripe ones will become mushy. To stop the cooking action, immerse peaches in cold water. Skins will easily slip from the peaches.

For strawberries and blackberries, first wash and then remove the calyx (hulls). If the calyx is removed first, the grit and dirt will get into the fruit. *Lift* fruit from the water rather than pour water from the fruit.

Prepare only 2 or 3 pints of fruit at one time. When these are in the freezer, prepare 2 or 3 more pints. This will reduce darkening of the fruit.

Peeled peaches, apples, and pears turn brown due to oxidation. Some varieties turn brown more than others. The following solutions help prevent fruit from darkening.

1. To 1 gallon of water, add 2 tablespoons salt and 2 tablespoons vinegar. Distilled (clear) vinegar is best. Do not allow fruit to stay in this solution longer than 15 to 20 minutes because the fruit may absorb the salt and vinegar flavor. Rinse fruit before sugar or syrup is added.

2. To 1 gallon water, add 1 teaspoon citric acid. (This is available in powder form at drugstores.) Do not leave fruit in this solution longer than 30 minutes because fruit may have a slightly acid flavor. Fruit does not need to be rinsed.

3. To 1 gallon water, add 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid. (This is available in powder form at drugstores.) Fruit does not need to be rinsed.

4. Use ascorbic acid *mixture* (this is available at grocery stores, drugstores, and freezer equipment dealerships), and follow manufacturer's directions—usually 2 teaspoons to 1 gallon water. Fruit does not need to be rinsed.

5. Drop peeled fruit immediately into syrup that may or may not have ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture added. For ascorbic acid, use  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon to each cup cold syrup. Follow manufacturer's directions for ascorbic acid mixture.

If you use methods 1, 2, 3, or 4, it is not necessary to add ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture to syrup or sugar, provided you prepare only 2 or 3 pints at one time. However, many homemakers do add one of these antioxidants. Ascorbic acid is vitamin C; this is one of the vitamins that cannot be stored in the body and should be eaten daily. Ascorbic acid mixture is generally composed of ascorbic acid, sucrose (sugar), and citric acid. Citric acid is from citrus fruits (lemons, grapefruits, etc.).

Freezing fruits with sugar or syrup isn't necessary, but it makes a better product. Many people are on a low-sugar intake and may want to use one of the sugar substitutes. Check with your physician to be sure this is acceptable. Recipes for using sugar substitutes can be obtained from the manufacturer.

**SYRUP PACK.** A 40-percent syrup (3 cups sugar in 4 cups water) is used for most fruits, depending on the natural sweetness of the fruit and how sweet you like it. Use about  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup syrup for each pint fruit. The syrup does not generally need to be heated to dissolve the sugar; just stir it. If it does become necessary to heat the syrup, cool it before adding the fruit.

Ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture can be added. Follow the manufacturer's directions for ascorbic acid mixture. For ascorbic acid, use  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon to 1 quart of cool syrup. Citric acid may give the fruit an acid taste.

Allow headspace in freezer containers for expansion. For pint containers with wide top opening, allow  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch; for quarts, 1 inch.

For pint containers with narrow top opening, allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch, for quarts,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. For glass jars, see Packing and Labeling Containers below. Be sure syrup covers the fruit. It may be necessary to put a small piece of parchment (wax) paper on top of the fruit to keep fruit in the syrup.

**SUGAR PACK.** Most fruits need about 1 pound of sugar to 4 pounds prepared fruit or about 2 cups of sugar to 12 cups of fruit, depending on individual taste. When freezing cut strawberries, peaches, apples, or pears, add ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture to the sugar to help prevent fruit darkening. Or add  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ascorbic acid to  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water and mix well with about 4 cups of prepared fruit; then add  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup sugar. For ascorbic acid mixture, follow manufacturer's directions. If fruit is juicy, ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture can be mixed with sugar.

Pack fruit firmly to remove as much air in container as possible. Air tends to dry food when it's frozen. Allow about  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch headspace for sugar packs for pint or quart containers. (See below.)

## **PACKING AND LABELING CONTAINERS**

Regardless of the food to be frozen, use a moisture/vaporproof freezer container—moistureproof so food will not dry out, vaporproof so odors will not penetrate the packaging material. There are other factors that are desirable, too. Two of the most common freezer containers for fruits are polyethylene freezer bags with cover boxes and rigid polyethylene freezer containers. Check new polyethylene freezer bags for leaks by filling with cold tap water.

Fill polyethylene freezer bags to within 3 inches of the top. Seal by twisting the top of the bag where the fruit ends to form a spiral, double it back, then wrap with a rubber band, pipe cleaner, or similar closure material about  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch *from* the fruit. This allows space for the fruit and syrup to expand. Always place bag in a cover box to protect it from tears or punctures. Moving food around in the freezer may damage the bag. Then the fruit will dry out, and some flavor, texture, and color will be lost. Also, the cover box is easier to store.

Write name of product and freezing date on each package.

Follow manufacturer's directions when using rigid polyethylene freezer containers.

Glass jars can break. When food freezes, it expands and the jar may break. If using standard canning jar with standard size opening, do not fill quite to shoulder of jar. Pint standard canning jars with tapering sides can be filled to within  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of top for dry packs and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch for those with liquid (quarts need 1 inch). Use new (flat) lids each time. Scald them before placing on jar.

A wax-type carton usually cannot be sealed airtight. And, too, the wax can crack at zero degrees. This is especially true of milk containers. Some of these are plastic coated, but the lid does not fit airtight, and the plastic coating is not moisture/vaporproof. Milk cartons are made to hold milk for about one week at refrigerator temperature—not food at zero degrees.

## **QUICK-FREEZING**

Always freeze food as quickly as possible so that cells will not break down. Broken cells make thawed food soft and flabby and juices seep out.

Place food in coldest part of freezer. If it is a chest type and does not have a special freezing compartment, the sides and bottom are the coldest. In an upright, there are special freezing shelves; in some of the newer models, all shelves are freezing shelves. Leave a small space between each package for fast freezing.

## **STORING**

After food is completely frozen (12 to 24 hours later), pack containers as close together as possible. Put all like fruit together—for example, strawberries in one row, peaches in one row, etc. Keep a record of how many pints and quarts you store of each fruit. As you use a package check it off your list. You will know exactly how many containers are left in the freezer.

All freezers should have a temperature of zero degrees or below. The basket, which is the warmest place in a chest-type freezer, should be at least zero degrees or below. In an upright, place thermometer on a nonfreezing shelf. Temperature here should be at least zero.

All recent reliable research shows that food that is frozen and stored at temperatures above zero is not as good in flavor, color, texture, and food value as that which is frozen at zero degrees or below. The colder the better. Read your use-care booklet and adjust the temperature; some freezers require a serviceman to do this.

## THAWING

Leave fruits in their airtight freezing containers for thawing. If the plastic freezer bag and cover box are used, the box can be removed. It is best to thaw any frozen food in the refrigerator because there is less seepage, and food-spoilage bacteria do not readily grow under 40 degrees. There is a possibility of fruit turning dark while thawing even though an antioxidant (ascorbic acid or ascorbic acid mixture) was used.

If it becomes necessary to thaw frozen food in a hurry, use this method: Place the sealed package on an elevated rack and allow a fan to blow on it. Turn the package every 10 minutes to allow even thawing. Food thaws very quickly this way, so be careful.

For more information, see Alabama Cooperative Extension System publication HE-1, *Food Preservation in Alabama*.

**Remember: For good quality frozen foods, one step depends on another.**

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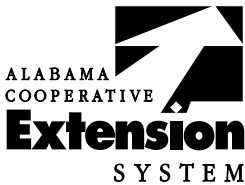
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**For more information**, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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