Tips for Freezing Fresh Produce

**VEGETABLES AND FRUIT**

1. **Pick fruits and vegetables at their peak ripeness** — Vegetables and fruits are best when bought fresh from your farmers’ market in season. When in season, they have more flavor and are usually less expensive.

2. **Wash and prep** — Wash your vegetables and fruits in cold water, and trim or remove any stems, leaves, or bruised areas. If necessary, peel, then cut down to desired size. For example: bell peppers can be diced as an easy addition to soups or stews, carrots can be cut into matchsticks for stirfries, and peaches can be pitted and roughly chopped for sauces, pies, etc.

3. **Blanch your vegetables (not necessary for fruit)** — Blanching stops the enzymes that keep vegetables ripening, helps get rid of dirt and bacteria, brightens color, slows vitamin and mineral loss, and wilts and softens the vegetables so they are easier to pack for freezing. Blanching also helps to preserve some of the “fresh” texture of the vegetable - but if you plan to use the items for soups or stocks blanching is not necessary. To blanch, bring a pot of water to a boil and place vegetables in for 2-5 minutes, (you can remove at 30 second intervals and test for doneness to your liking), then plunge into a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. When the vegetables have cooled, remove from the ice water bath and pat dry with a clean kitchen cloth or paper towels.

4. **Prepare for freezer storage** — The washed fruits/blanched and cooled vegetables can be frozen in a single layer on cookie sheets, and then put into bags, jars or other freezer-safe storage containers. Using cookie sheets for freezing ensures that the fruits and vegetables won’t all stick together, which will allow you to remove a handful at a time from the container. Once you have things prepared for storage, be sure to label the container with the date and contents!
1. **Pick herbs at their peak ripeness** — As with fruits and vegetables, choose herbs that are fresh and bright at your farmers’ market. This will ensure they have the most flavor, texture, and vitamin content.

2. **Wash and prep** — Gently wash your herbs in cold water, being careful to remove dirt from leaves and stems. Pat herbs dry.

3. **Option 1:** Spread evenly onto cookie sheet or tray and place in freezer. Spreading the herbs out individually prevents them freezing together into big clumps.

   **Option 2:** Chop herbs. Place spoonfuls of chopped herbs into an empty ice cube tray and fill the tray halfway with water (herbs may tend to float, which is why you will only fill the tray halfway with water). Put tray into freezer and let freeze partially; once mostly frozen fill the rest of the tray up with water and place back into freezer. Once the cubes are frozen, you can remove them from the tray and put the cubes into bags or other freezer-safe containers.

   **Option 3** (Best option for hard herbs like Rosemary, Sage, Thyme, and Oregano): Either finely chop or leave herbs in larger sprigs and leaves. Pack the herbs into wells of an ice cube tray about 2/3 full. Pour extra virgin olive oil or melted, unsalted butter over the herbs. Place tray into freezer and freeze overnight. Once the cubes are frozen, you can remove them from the tray and put the cubes into bags or other freezer-safe containers.