



\* \* \* \* \* **Cooking with Ailsa**

## ... Your Freezer for Economy

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The two main advantages with a freezer are economy and convenience and this month I would like to talk about the savings you can make. Everyone who has a vegetable garden has had the experience of seeing 10 beautiful cabbages ready for picking and not knowing what to do with them.

If you serve cabbage for dinner for the third day in succession your family will rebel, but if they are left in the ground for another week they will be fit only for the compost heap. Not now! Just freeze them. Wash and shred finely and put in one meal size lot at a time into a saucepan of boiling water. Boil vigorously for two minutes, then cool in a colander under running cold water, shake as dry as possible, package, label and freeze. I always add one stalk of chopped celery to every meal pack of cabbage, whether fresh or frozen and find it improves the flavour greatly. I would not describe cabbage as the most popular vegetable but feel it is much maligned. If it is cooked properly it can be delicious, but overcooked it is revolting. My method is to wash well, shred finely with celery and put in a heavy-based saucepan with a good tablespoon of butter, pepper and salt to taste, put on the lid and cook briskly, shaking frequently. Ten minutes is ample cooking time and a fresh, young cabbage should need only five.

Tomatoes are always at their cheapest and best just when you are in the throes of fruit bottling and jam making, but even if you haven't time to make your spaghetti, soup, sauce, or whatever you intend to do, surely you have the time to chop them roughly into a preserving pan, bring to the boil, cool, package and freeze. Then they are ready when you are for further preparation. The same applies to all your fruit for jam. If you can't manage your jam immediately, stew the fruit to a pulp and freeze until you are ready to proceed.

Eggs in this country are subject to great fluctuations in price and it always seems that they are at their dearest when you need them most. Last September they were cheap in Auckland so I made my Christmas cakes, four sponge cakes and froze them all, as well as two dozen raw eggs. I did mine in lots of three as this is the number I use for a sponge or for scrambled eggs. I used small plastic containers with clip-on lids,

ten cents each, but worth it, as they may be used over and over again. The method is simple. Break three eggs into a small basin, add a quarter teaspoon of salt, beat lightly with a fork and package. I have made sponges and my extremely fussy son has not been able to tell the difference and scrambled eggs taste completely normal. Be wary of adding too much salt when cooking as it is easy to forget that they have already been salted.

Watch your butchers and supermarkets for specials on meat and vegetables. In the flush of the season you can buy a case of cauliflowers for little more than you would pay for one later in the year. Break into flowerets, wash, blanch in the usual manner, package and freeze. When cooking it is better steamed or at any rate lightly cooked as it is easy to overcook and mushy cauliflower is just as unpalatable as mushy cabbage. Carrots are cheap and at their best at the moment and they freeze well. Do you serve a lot of soups and stews in the winter? If you do, why not freeze several packs of mixed vegetables. You know better than I do what quantities you would use for your family, but how is this for a start? Two carrots, one parsnip, one onion and one stalk of celery, washed, chopped and blanched. Beans have a rather short season but are usually very prolific and even if you don't grow them they can be bought in large quantities from the market gardens very cheaply. I prefer scarlet runners, even if they do take a bit more preparation and always feel that commercial processors freeze the wrong varieties. There is a distinct difference between commercially and home frozen beans, and I'm sure this is the reason.

Much that I tell you seems very elementary, but it is easy to fall into little traps when you first start freezing your own produce and if I can help you to avoid them so much the better. Try to freeze everything into similar shaped packs, preferably square or oblong in shape and in small quantities. After all, you can thaw two

packs of beans if you have visitors, but it is rather a nuisance having to put half of a large package back into store. Ice-cube trays, oblong casseroles, cake tins, almost anything of suitable size may be used as moulds to freeze food which, when frozen may be removed by dipping the mould into warm water as you would a jelly, then placing the resultant block in a plastic bag, wrapping in sheet plastic or aluminium foil. Do label everything carefully. It is rather disconcerting to find a mysterious little bag in the furthest corner and have no recollection of what you put in it or when it was frozen. Dates are also most important as the different types of food all have a recommended freezer life. A list of contents kept right up to date saves much fruitless searching for something you are sure must be there until somebody reminds you that you used it last month. I keep a notebook hanging beside my freezer but my daughter writes duplicate labels and sticks one on the package and one on the inside of the freezer lid.

All berry fruits freeze well for jam or cooking but are a little unreliable to use as fresh fruit. It is something to do with the fact that the juice expands as it freezes and this breaks down the cell structure, and on thawing they tend to collapse and become soggy. One friend, Geraldine Dawson, a clergy wife, tried strawberries when she first bought her freezer but was not very pleased with the result, so the next year she hulled them, sprinkled them with sugar and mashed them gently with a potato masher, not enough to turn them into pulp, but just to break them up. They were delicious in shortcakes and similar dishes. Have you given up bottling the large red plums because they seemed so sour? Nancy Laing, our Past Provincial President, had but the summer before last experimented with freezing them by cutting the flesh off the stone, sprinkling with sugar and stirring gently until the sugar was dissolved, then packaging in bags. They were so successful that this summer she did 14 bags. When she wants to use them she just simmers gently with extra sugar if needed.

Another spectacular economy is the saving of left-overs. That last little piece of cold meat—what do you do with it? Probably the same as most of us—keep it a few more days then throw it out! The best thing is to make it into sandwiches and freeze until required. Small portions of stews, soups, desserts, cakes, stewed fruit can all be frozen and used up later for single meals. Use your ingenuity and don't be afraid to experiment. Freezing doesn't improve produce but maintains it at its best, so it must be at its best when it is stored. In this connection I'd like to give a warning. A friend attended a wedding breakfast and in company with many other guests developed food poisoning. The Health Department inspector who investigated the case put it down to the trifles. Many caterers freeze unused trifles for the next wedding and this is perfectly good food-handling practice provided there has been no deterioration in quality before freezing, which doesn't kill bacteria but merely inhibits its growth. Immediately upon thawing the bacteria multiply rapidly and can be extremely dangerous. Such desserts are always a little suspect in hot weather and must be kept

in the refrigerator from the time of making until serving.

Next month I will tell you a little about using your freezer for convenience, how to save yourself time as well as money and provide tasty and appetising meals even on your busiest days.

Q. A member heard a radio interview in connection with deep freezing and this person said not to use salt when freezing eggs but to add it when cooking. Our member rang the School of Home Science and they also leaned towards the "no salt" idea.

A. My instruction book with my freezer says that egg yolks tend to be rather "gummy" after freezing and thawing unless salt is added, so I have followed the book and have been very satisfied with the results, but on receipt of this query I froze another three eggs without salt, so as soon as I have used them I will give you my opinion of the result.

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# A storage guide for food

(In the Freezer at 0degF)

## 3-4 weeks

Sausages, frankfurters, bacon, ham, pickled pork, canapes.

## 4-6 weeks

Uncooked meat loaves, seasoned hamburgers, sandwiches, meatballs, cheese puffs, dips with sour cream or cream cheese.

## 1-2 months

Breadcrumbs, ice-cream, parfait, sherbert, filled cream puffs or eclairs.

## 2-3 months

Uncooked oily-type fish, uncooked goose, duck, minced meat.  
Cooked beef, lamb, pork, veal, poultry.  
Creamed mixtures of chicken, seafood, mushrooms.  
Sauces, soups, gravies, meat stock, frozen dinners, baked fruit pies, unbaked yeast dough and rolls.

## 3-4 months

Cooked stews, casseroles, meat loaves, clarified drippings.  
Uncooked pork chops, stewing meat, variety meats, meat pies.  
Baked and unbaked pastry, tart or pie shells.  
Baked sponge or chiffon cakes with or without icing, unfilled cream puffs.  
Grated cheese.

## 4-5 months

Uncooked lamb chops, pork roasts, veal. Cooked waffles, pancakes, crepes, steamed puddings.

## 4-6 months

Uncooked lean-type fish and seafood.  
Uncooked jointed poultry.  
Cheese in ½lb blocks (except cream cheese), uncooked fruit pies.  
Baked butter cakes (with or without icing), baked muffins, doughnuts, quick breads, yeast and bread rolls.

## 6-8 months

Biscuit dough, baked biscuits.  
Uncooked lamb roasts, beef steaks.  
Fruit juices, nuts.

## 8-12 months

Uncooked beef roasts, uncooked chicken and turkey.  
Baked rich fruitcake, steamed plum pudding.

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## TIPS IN PACKING CASSEROLES

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1. Use a rigid container as a mould for the food — the same one you plan to use in warming or baking the food.
2. Line container with foil, leaving ample amount to fold over top when food is frozen.
3. Insert a knife blade into the food several times to release any air. Freeze.
4. When frozen, remove the solid food block and fold aluminium foil securely over top. Package suitably.
5. Label and store in freezer.
6. To serve, remove from freezer one hour before baking. Remove foil and place in original casserole.

## To Deep-freeze celery.

Wash, trim, cut in pieces & blanch (without salt) 1 1/2 mins from when water boils. Cool quickly.

Pack & freeze when all moisture & air are expelled.

Free-flow method if desired. Can keep up to 12 mths.

Cook: Put in rapidly boiling water & when re-boils, simmer 4-5 mins. Do not over-cook.

## Figs

Select well-grown ripe, round fruit. Peel & slice.

Pack in 40% sugar syrup. Put in small containers & freeze. Lemon or orange juice may be added to syrup.

## Asparagus.

Best prepared within 2 hours of cutting.

Wash stalks well & sort according to size. Tie in bundles & cut to 4 1/2 to 5 inches. Blanch for 3 minutes, cool, drain seal in bags & freeze.

## R/Oats.

Recommended for prevention diabetes, heart disease & h.b.p.  
Health declined in Scotland since porridge eating declined.  
Research (U.S.A) claims regular diet in R. Oats between 60/90% of diabetics (depending on age) can be taken off insulin & drugs.  
~~Some~~ Drs. discovered porridge helps reduce blood sugar & fats.  
It reduces blood cholesterol by a third - caused by a gummy fibre material found in oats & seen when boiled. Oat bran particularly rich in this fibre. When gummy fibre reaches colon, it is fermented by bacteria in body to produce fatty acids.