



BLANCHING VEGETABLES

All vegetables, except peppers, onions and water chestnuts, need to be heated by blanching before packaging for the freezer to prevent loss in color, flavor, texture and nutritive value.

Blanching is especially important if the vegetables are to be frozen for more than a few months. The heat from blanching destroys enzymes that reduce quality.

Blanching is the exposure of vegetables to boiling water or steam for a brief period of time. The vegetable must then be rapidly cooled in ice water to prevent it from cooking. Contrary to statements in some publications on home freezing, in most cases blanching is absolutely essential for producing top quality frozen vegetables.

Blanching also helps to destroy microorganisms on the surface of the vegetable and to make some vegetables such as broccoli or spinach more compact.

The quality of water used to blanch vegetables can have an effect on the texture of certain vegetables. Very hard water can cause the toughening of vegetables such as green beans. If you have problems with tough green beans, check into the level of hardness in your water supply.

Vegetables can be blanched in boiling water or steam. There is very little difference in the loss of nutritional value in these two methods.

To blanch in boiling water, you will need a large kettle with a tight-fitting lid. Use one gallon water for each pound of vegetable except for leafy greens, which need two gallons per pound.

Bring water to rolling boil. Immerse wire basket, blanching basket or mesh bag containing vegetable. Cover kettle and boil at top heat the required length of time. Time schedules for blanching can be found in a number of food preservation books and leaflets. **Home Freezing of Vegetables**, #2724, \$1.75, contains a wide range of information, and can be purchased at your local Cooperative Extension office. Begin counting time as soon as the water returns to a boil. You may use the same blanching water two or three times. Keep it at the required level. Change the water if it becomes cloudy.

It is important to chill vegetables immediately after blanching. This can be done by plunging the basket of vegetables into pans of ice water for the same time used for blanching water. Keep the water cold by changing frequently or by adding ice. Drain vegetables thoroughly. Extra water will form too many ice crystals. Pack, using dry or tray pack method. Freeze.

Another chilling method is evaporative cooling. Spread the vegetables in a single layer in front of a fan. As the water evaporates, the vegetables are cooled. This chilling method does not add water to the vegetables. The result is often a less mushy product. With either method, check the center of a piece of food to be sure it is cool. Never package warm vegetables.

Some manufacturers of microwave ovens print directions for blanching vegetables. This method usually calls for a small quantity of vegetables and a small amount of water. Power settings and time schedules are included with the directions. This is an acceptable method.

Adapted from **BLANCHING VEGETABLES FOR FREEZING**, DANR-NR #FZ601, by Susan Osaki and C. Gavranich. UC Cooperative Extension, Auburn, CA. 1994.

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