

HACK YOUR FREEZER

Ah, the freezer. The oft-underutilized workhorse when it comes to eating well without really having to cook every night. The only enemy is air, which leads to freezer burn- make sure you squish as much air out of your containers and bags as possible to extend the life of frozen foods.

Freeze everything. Double your recipe whenever you make the following items and freeze half:

Beans: Store in jars or bags, covered in liquid (water or broth works fine) to prevent freezer burn. Lasts indefinitely.

Grains: Rice, quinoa, oats.... Any grain freezes well. You can simply put the freshly cooked grain into a bag or bottle and freeze or you can spread the cooked grain on sheet pans in the freezer, wait for them to freeze, and then put into a jar or bag. Frozen grains should be consumed within a month or two, as they are more susceptible to freezer burn.

- If freezing grains straight into a jar: This requires a little more foresight when you want to use them later on, since you will have a big frozen clump of grains. Defrost in fridge for 2 days for easiest removal, or put jar in a bowl of warm water to speed up defrosting. If you free the grains from the container but are left with a giant brick of frozen grains, here is the quickest way to cook them: Put the clump into a pot with a lid. Pour ½ inch of water in the bottom of the pot and turn the heat to medium. Cover and let the steam defrost the grains. Occasionally break apart with a wooden spoon as the outer layers thaw.
- If you pre-freeze the grains on a sheet pan, they will pour right out of the jar when you're ready to use them.
- In either case, when re-heating grains you may need to add in additional liquid as the grains tend to dry out a bit.

Any soup or sauce: (with one caveat – potatoes can turn a bit mealy when frozen and then defrosted. Edible... but not as delicious as the first time around.

Greens: Cook greens normally and then freeze in baggies or jars. Make sure all extra air is pressed out to prevent freezer burn.

Herbs: Whenever you use fresh herbs for a recipe but have some left over, chop them up and put them into ice cube trays. Fill with oil and freeze. Once frozen, transfer into a plastic bag. Use whenever you are making a sauce or marinade!

Tomato paste: Tired of throwing out half-empty jars of tomato paste? Portion out tablespoons of tomato paste on a sheet pan or plate and place in the freezer. Once frozen, transfer into a bag or jar and use whenever a recipe calls for it.

Ginger: Peel all of your ginger in one fell swoop and then freeze it in a bag. Whenever a recipe calls for ginger, grate some of the frozen ginger with a cheese grater or microplane. This takes the hassle out of using fresh ginger.

Meat: All raw meat and seafood freezes beautifully. Most cooked meat freezes well too – double the amount of ground beef in your next recipe, freeze half in a baggie (push out as much air as possible), and use for pizzas, pastas, etc. Saucy meat freezes especially well (pulled pork or pot roast, for example.)

Raw vegetables: You have two options. One is to lightly steam or blanch the vegetables quickly before freezing. The other is to put raw vegetables into a bag, cover with water, and freeze in the water.

Cheese: Yes! Cheese freezes well (think of all those frozen pizzas). The next time you have too much cheese on your hands, don't let it go bad – throw it in the freezer and save it for later.

Scraps for stock: Keep a compostable bag or gallon size zip lock in the fridge for all of your food scraps – onion and garlic peels, fennel fronds, carrot tops, mushroom stems, the bottoms and tops of celery, herb stems, etc. When the bag is full, dump into a large stockpot, cover with water, boil and simmer for at least an hour, then strain and voila, homemade soup stock (and your house will smell wonderful!). Use immediately or freeze the strained stock for use in recipes later on.