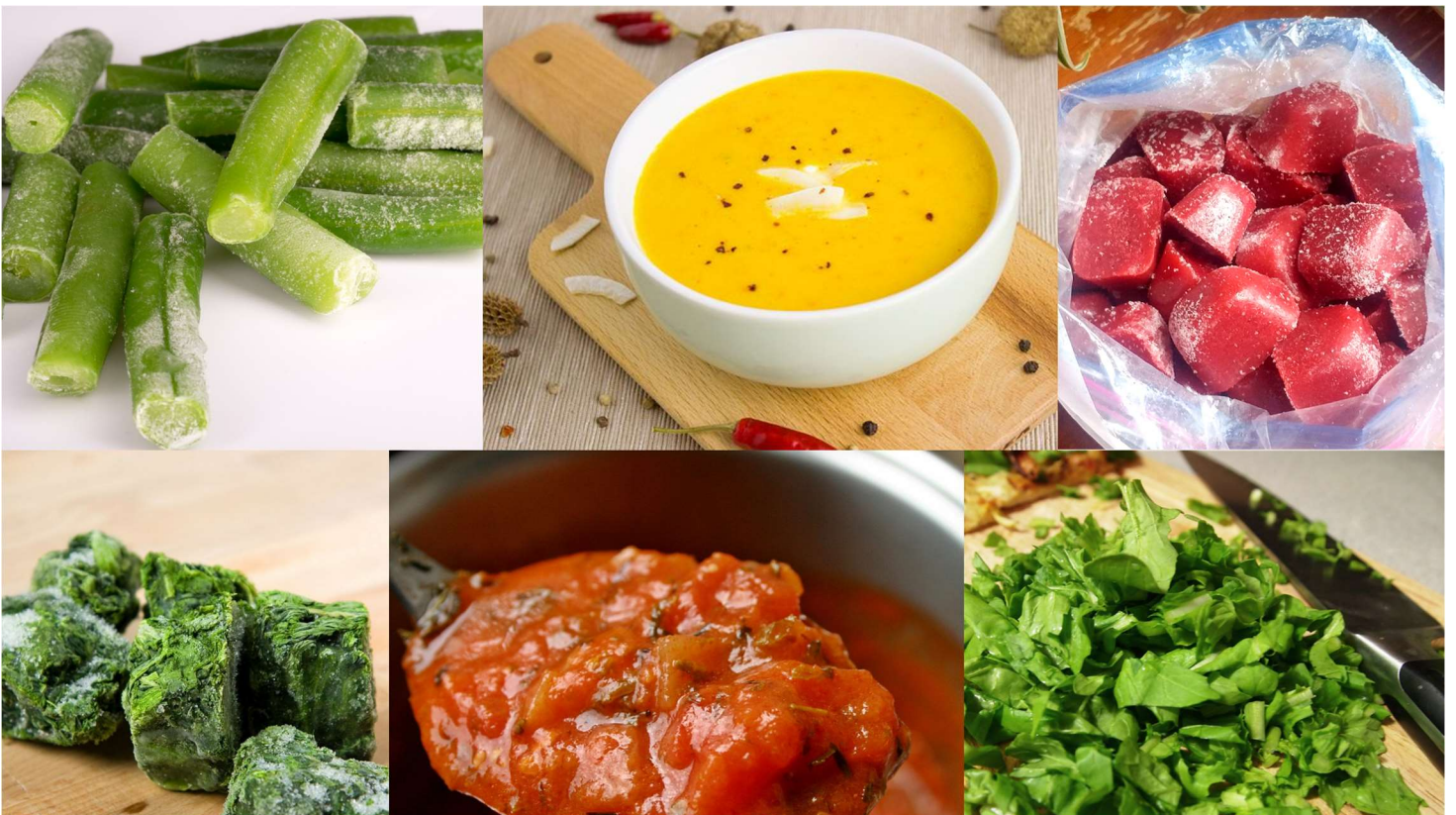


# How to Freeze (almost) Every Vegetable in your CSA Share!



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# Introduction

Freezing foods is a great way to extend the storage life of fresh nutrient dense local organic foods. Here are some of the benefits to freezing vegetables:

1. **Simplicity.** Of all the methods of preserving food, freezing is one of the easiest, fastest ways and it requires very little special equipment.
2. **Flavour and Nutrients.** Freezing preserves the flavours and nutrients of your fresh local organic vegetables and herbs.
3. **Save Time.** You can make a double batch of a recipe in less time than it would take you to make the same recipe twice.
4. **Save money.** By freezing the fresh organic abundance from your CSA share, you'll reduce your food costs in the off-season.
5. **Convenience.** It's pretty handy to open up the freezer on a busy day and pull out something home cooked and nutritious for dinner. With minimal effort you can just thaw and re-heat. You can prepare a big batch of pre-sorted, washed, and chopped vegetables and freeze some or all of it for another day when you'll need to cook dinner in a hurry.
6. **Reduce Waste.** Some weeks, CSA share might be a lot to handle, say, if you are out in the evenings a lot, or you go away for the weekend, or you just have a lot of tomatoes coming out of your own backyard garden. In that case freezing some of your veggies can ensure your vegetables are all used, eventually.

In this guide I'll explain the proper techniques for freezing vegetables. I'll let you know which vegetables are good frozen and



*Whole frozen garlic scapes*

which ones are not. I'll share with you a couple of recipes that use lots of veggies and are great for putting in the freezer for convenient meals.

## A caution about texture

It's important to note that frozen vegetables are not going to maintain their firm texture after freezing. Freezing breaks down the cell walls the same way cooking does. So it's easy to over-cook them so that they become mushy.

Your frozen vegetables will not require cooking for a lengthy period of time. You can just quickly thaw and reheat them.

I don't generally recommend using frozen vegetables as a featured side dish all on their own. They work much better added to recipes like smoothies, soups, stews, sauces, baking, and casseroles.

When you are adding them to a recipe, do it at the very end, a few moments before serving.



*Green Beans*

## What vegetables can you freeze?

The chart on the next page shows all the CSA vegetables that you can freeze if you wish. When referring to the star rating, please note that 1 star means freezing *not* recommended, while 5 stars means freezing highly recommended.

Some vegetables are more suitable for freezing than others, so you'll have to look at your own situation to decide what is most useful for your household.

I've included examples of how you can use the frozen vegetables common to our CSA and have included some factors to consider when deciding.

Vegetable or Herb	Rating	Uses and other considerations
<b>Arugula</b>	★★★★☆	<p>Use for soups, sauces and casseroles as you would for frozen spinach. Chop in at least two directions before cooking to avoid “stringy” or tangled stems. You may find the flavour too strong for smoothies. Note that cooked arugula is not as spicy as raw, but cooking does increase the bitterness. Bitter greens are not everyone’s cup of tea so make sure you test the flavour of cooked arugula to see if you like it before adding large quantities to your meals.</p> <p>You can also make arugula pesto and freeze that.</p>
<b>Baby Kale</b>	★★★★★	<p>Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles as you would for frozen spinach. Chop in at least two directions before cooking to avoid “stringy” or tangled stems.</p>
<b>Beans</b>	★★★★★	<p>Use for soups, sauces, casseroles, or thawed but unheated in salads like pasta, potato, or whole grain.</p>
<b>Beets</b>	★★☆☆☆	<p>There is not a huge need to freeze beets since they keep well in the fridge for a long time. However, there are lots of yummy beet soup recipes so if you freeze soups you might end up freezing some beets along the way.</p>
<b>Bok Choy</b>	★★★★☆	<p>Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles as you would for frozen spinach.</p>
<b>Broccoli</b>	★★★★★	<p>Best fresh, but frozen broccoli can work okay on pizza or in casseroles</p>

Vegetable or Herb	Rating	Uses and other considerations
<b>Cabbage</b>	★★★★☆	There is not a huge need to freeze cabbage since it keeps well in the fridge for a long time and it's so delicious in sauerkraut and kimchi. However it can be a great addition to borscht or other vegetable soups so if you freeze soups you might end up freezing some cabbage along the way.
<b>Carrots</b>	★★★★☆	There is not a huge need to freeze carrots since they keep well in the fridge for a long time and most people just prefer to eat them raw. However, carrots can be a great addition to prepared foods like soups so if you get into freezing prepared foods you might end up freezing some carrots along the way.
<b>Cucumber</b>	★★★★☆	Cube and freeze raw for smoothies.
<b>Eggplant</b>	★★★★★	My favourite method is to make baba ghanoush and freeze that. You can also chop or slice your eggplant, roast it with some olive oil, and then freeze it for adding to pasta, dips, sauces, soups and stews.
<b>Fennel</b>	★★★★★	Chopped frozen fennel can be a great addition to soups, sauces and stews.
<b>Garlic</b>	★★★★★	If you don't have a great place to hang your garlic to dry, freezing is a viable alternative. A friend recommended this approach to me since this is how her mother has stored garlic for many years. Her mother separates the cloves and leaves the innermost "wrapper" on the clove as extra protection against freezer burn before placing them in freezer bags. When you want to use some for a recipe you just take the cloves you need out of the freezer, peel and chop them frozen. Or, let cloves thaw and soften before you start chopping if you wish.
<b>Green Onion</b>	★★★★☆	Chopped frozen green onions can be added to just about any recipe that calls for onions or green onions.

Vegetable or Herb	Rating	Uses and other considerations
<b>Ground Cherries</b>	★★★★★	Use in smoothies or fruit desserts. Can be mixed and matched with apples, rhubarb and berries in pies, crisps and cakes.
<b>Herbs</b>	★★★★★	This guide won't go into detail about herbs because there is a whole other guide for preserving herbs. Check it out to learn more.
<b>Kale (and Kohlrabi Greens)</b>	★★★★★	Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles, as you would for frozen spinach.
<b>Kohlrabi</b>	★★☆☆☆	There is not a huge need to freeze kohlrabi since it keeps well in the fridge for a long time and it's versatile and can be used in so many different fresh and cooked recipes. It's also a good candidate for fermenting or pickling. However, if you wish you can freeze chopped kohlrabi and add it to soups, stews and sauces.
<b>Leeks</b>	★★★★☆	Chopped frozen leeks can be added to just about any recipe that calls for onions or leeks. Also keeps well in the fridge
<b>Mizuna</b>	★★★★★	Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, and casseroles as you would for frozen spinach. Chop in at least two directions before cooking to avoid "stringy" or tangled stems.
<b>Mustard Greens Mix (and Turnips Tops)</b>	★★★★☆	Use for soups, sauces and casseroles as you would for frozen spinach. Chop in at least two directions before cooking to avoid "stringy" or tangled stems. You may find the flavour too strong for smoothies. Note that cooked mustard mix is not as spicy as raw, but cooking increases the bitterness. Bitter greens are not everyone's cup of tea so make sure you test the flavour of cooked mustard mix to see if you like it before adding in large quantities to your meals. You can also make mustard greens mix pesto and freeze that.

Vegetable or Herb	Rating	Uses and other considerations
<b>Onions</b>	★★★★☆	Onions keep just as well at room temperature or in cold storage but for some, freezing onions is about convenience. Frozen onions won't make you cry when chopping and it's nice to not have to peel them every single time you cook. You can peel, halve and rinse the onions and put them right into a freezer bag. This might not be for everyone so if you want to give it try maybe just freeze a bag or two and see how it goes.
<b>Parsnip</b>	★★★★☆	There is not a huge need to freeze parsnips since they keep so well in a bag in the fridge. Parsnips can be a great addition to prepared foods like soups so you might end up freezing some parsnips along the way.
<b>Peas</b>	★★★★★	Probably best fresh but if you have too many, freezing peas is the best way to preserve their summer flavour. Frozen peas can be used in casseroles, sauces or soups.
<b>Peppers</b>	★★★★★	Use in soups, stews, sauces, pizza, pasta, dips and spreads. Roasting first and then freezing really enhances the flavour.
<b>Rhubarb</b>	★★★★★	Use in fruit desserts. Can be mixed and matched with apples, berries and other fruits in pies, crisps and cakes.
<b>Spinach</b>	★★★★★	Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles, pasta dishes, spinach dip, lasagne, quiche, pizza, fritters and bread.
<b>Sweet Potatoes</b>	★★★★☆	There is not a huge need to freeze sweet potatoes since they keep so well at room temperature. However sweet potatoes can be a great addition to prepared foods like soups so you might end up freezing some sweet potatoes along the way.
<b>Swiss Chard (and Beet Greens)</b>	★★★★★	Use for smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles as you would for frozen spinach.



Vegetable or Herb	Rating	Uses and other considerations
<b>Tomatoes</b>	★★★★★	<p>The easiest way to preserve tomatoes is to wash, core/trim and put in a freezer bag whole. Take out to thaw a bit and the skins will slip off. Great in place of whole canned tomatoes or make DIY stewed tomatoes (simmer 20 minutes). Cherry tomatoes can be frozen whole or halved for pizza or to be added to recipes that use lightly cooked grape or cherry tomatoes. Add at the end of the cooking time. Lastly, prepare a big batch of tomato sauce and freeze half of it for another day when you'll need dinner in a hurry.</p>
<b>Turnips</b>	★★★★☆	<p>There is not a huge need to freeze turnips since they keep so well in the fridge for a long time. However, turnips can be a great addition to prepared foods like soups so if you get into freezing prepared foods you might end up freezing some turnips along the way.</p>
<b>Winter Squash</b>	★★★★☆	<p>There is not a huge need to freeze winter squash since they keep so well at room temperature or in a cool room. If you have a lot and you are worried about them “going off” you can roast them and put them in the freezer. Winter squash can be a great addition to prepared foods like soups so you might end up freezing some winter squash that way as well.</p>
<b>Zucchini and Summer Squash</b>	★★★★★	<p>Zucchini &amp; summer squash tend to come in large quantities in the middle of summer. Even people who love it can sometimes find it a bit much all at once.</p> <p>Bakers can grate the zucchini and freeze it for muffins and breads. You can also use chopped, sliced or shredded zucchini in smoothies, soups, sauces, casseroles, pasta dishes, lasagne, quiche, pizza and fritters. Depending on the recipe, You may need to allow time to let it thaw so you can strain and press out the extra moisture before adding it to your recipes. This step is less important for soups, stews, casseroles and smoothies. Note that zucchini and summer squash can also be preserved by being made into relish and pickles.</p>

There are two main ways that I freeze vegetables:

- 1) As prepared foods such as soups, stews, dips/spreads, etc.
- 2) As constituent vegetables

## Prepared Foods

### What's your freezer strategy?

Freezer space is often a limiting factor, so I invite you to be strategic about how you use it.

I prefer to freeze primarily vegetable-based foods: soups, sauces, chili, and stew and vegetable-based spreads: pesto, baba ghanoush, etc. I prefer not to dedicate freezer space to foods which contain vegetables, meat and grains (like casseroles). I already stock the freezer with different cuts of meat, and whole and milled grains are easier to store in the pantry or buy year-round. By contrast, many local vegetables become much less available in the winter and I want to preserve some of those yummy summer flavours!

Your situation might be different, so you'll have to decide what your priorities are for your own freezer.



*Strawberry-Rhubarb Compote Cubes*

### Method

The method for freezing prepared foods is pretty much the same for all soups, sauces, stews and vegetable-based dips.

Prepare the food according to your recipe. Consider making a big batch, so you can eat some right away and set aside some for the freezer.

Allow the food to cool just enough to safely pour or ladle it into containers. For example, if you are eating some right away, you can usually just put the freezer portion away when you are tidying up after your meal.

If you transfer the food while it's still hot you can actually melt the plastic of your freezer containers, However, if you let cooked food sit out at room temperature for more than an hour that will increase the chance of it spoiling. If you can't freeze the prepared foods within an hour, put it in the fridge so that it is waiting at a safe temperature for later when you have time to freeze it.

To package frozen prepared foods, choose hard sided containers. It's not recommended to store prepared foods in really large containers because they take longer to freeze and thaw. 1 litre is usually a good maximum size for most foods. You can always take 2 or even 3 containers out of the freezer if you are feeding a bigger crowd.

Here are some suggestions:

Type of food	Suggested container size
<b>Stew, Chilli and Soups</b>	1 litre will make 2 medium portions or 4 appetizer/side portions. One person with a big appetite could probably eat a whole litre if it is their entire meal.
<b>Stew, Chilli and Soups (packed for lunch)</b>	Use smaller containers, approximately 500mL (2 cups).
<b>Dips/spreads/pesto</b>	Most dips come in approximately 250 mL (1 cup) containers but you can certainly go bigger or smaller depending on how you expect to be using it.
<b>Sauces and Curries</b>	1 litre will serve about 2 to 4 people.



*Freezing sauces and soups is an easy and fast way to preserve the harvest.*

When freezing, it is important to limit the excess air in the container. Allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  " headspace for containers around 500 mL and smaller. For larger containers, e.g. 1 litre, allow a headspace of 1".

When liquids freeze, they expand, that means there would be consequences to filling containers too full. The liquid might expand right out of the container and spill or the liquid can push the lid off so that it the container no longer seals properly. And make sure that your containers are level while they are freezing to keep them from leaking or expanding into the lid on one side; you can rearrange them after they have frozen.

## **Recipe: Garden Vegetable Soup**

Takes 35 mins to prepare. Serves 4.

I think this soup recipe was originally sent to me in summer of 2010 by Susan, a CSA member. I have adapted it and you can make it when you need to use up the odds and ends in the fridge. No matter what combination you choose, it's going to taste good because you're be starting with great-tasting fresh local organic vegetables.

If you want to have a batch for eating right away and a batch for the freezer, you'll want to scale up the recipe appropriately.

You can substitute fresh diced tomatoes for tomato paste if you are making this recipe in peak tomato season. Just chop and simmer some tomatoes in a pot until they break down to your desired consistency (about 15 to 20 minutes). You can use the simmered tomatoes in any quantity up to 3 cups. If using simmered tomatoes,

you'll need to reduce the amount of broth you use in this recipe so that the total liquids that you add is 3 cups. So if you use 2 cups of simmered tomatoes you should only add 1 cup broth. If you want to use 3 cups of simmered tomatoes, don't add any broth at all. Add a bouillon cube instead. Note that simmered tomatoes are thicker than broth so if you use more of those it will make a soup with a heartier consistency--it will also be more likely to stick to the bottom of the pan and burn, so stir often.

Here are some vegetables you can mix and match for this recipe:

Hard Vegetables	Medium/Firm Vegetables	Tender Vegetables
<i>added at the beginning and cooked the longest</i>	<i>added in the middle</i>	<i>– added at the end and cooked the shortest time.</i>
<b>Beets</b> <b>Carrots</b> <b>Eggplant*</b> <b>Fennel</b> <b>Kohlrabi</b> <b>Potatoes</b> <b>Watermelon</b> <b>Radish</b> <b>Winter Squash</b>	Bok Choy stems Cabbage Eggplant* Green Beans Parsnips Sweet Potatoes Peppers Turnips	Zucchini and summer squash Greens Bok Choy greens Broccoli Peas

\*depending on your preference, add eggplant earlier or later.

## Ingredients

- ½ to 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- 3 cups chopped or sliced mixed vegetables
- ½ cup diced onion, green onion or leeks
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups broth (beef, chicken or vegetable) or water
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ¾ teaspoon dried herbs or 1 Tbsp fresh herbs (basil, cilantro, dill, oregano, thyme, sage or rosemary)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- More fresh herbs to taste (optional)

## Directions

Lightly coat the pan with cooking oil.

Sauté any hard vegetables, onions or leeks and garlic over low heat until softened, about 5 minutes.

Add broth, any medium firm vegetables, tomato paste and simmer, covered about 15 minutes or until beans are tender.

Stir in any tender vegetables and heat 3-4 minutes.

Serve hot.

## **Recipe: Pesto**

This is flexible mix-and-match recipe for pesto. You can choose to use different greens and herbs and nuts from the chart below based on what you prefer and what you have on hand.

Herbs and Greens	Nuts and seeds
Arugula	Pine nuts
Kale (baby or big)	Walnuts
Mizuna	Pistachios
Mixed Mustard Greens	Almonds
Spinach	Cashews
Mint	Sunflower seeds
Oregano	Pumpkin seeds
Basil	
Cilantro	
Dill	
Parsley	
Garlic Scapes*	

*\*If using you are garlic scapes as your greens, you don't need to add any garlic cloves*

Here are a few suggested combinations:

- Basil and pine nuts
- Cilantro and pumpkin seeds
- Kale, parsley and walnut



## Ingredients:

- 2 Garlic cloves or scapes
- 3 cups Greens or herbs, packed
- ¼ cup Nuts or seeds
- ¼ cup Olive oil, extra virgin
- ½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated (For a vegan alternative try avocado instead)
- ½ Lemon juice (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste (optional)

## Directions:

Add ingredients to your food processor and process in the following order:

1. Garlic
2. Greens or Herbs
3. Nuts
4. Olive oil
5. Parmesan cheese
6. Salt, pepper and lemon juice (optional)

Add more olive oil or water and process more until the pesto reaches your desired consistency.

Ways to use pesto:

- pasta
- pizza
- chicken
- salmon
- wraps and sandwiches
- scrambled eggs
- roasted vegetable salad
- grain or pasta salad
- salad dressing
- dip

## **Freezing constituent vegetables**

When I say “constituent vegetables,” I mean freezing a bag of spinach all on its own, or a bag of green beans all on its own, as opposed to freezing a spinach quiche or a green bean casserole.

If you've looked into freezing vegetables you've probably noticed that most often vegetables are blanched before freezing. However there are some situations where you don't need to blanch the veggies; I'll explain why.

## Freezing vegetables raw

Depending on how you are going to use the vegetables, blanching may not be necessary. Specifically, if you are only concerned with flavour and not colour, you can skip blanching your vegetables before freezing.

Here are some examples where colour is not overly important:

1. **Herbs, hot peppers and garlic.** Flavour is more important than colour when using these seasonings. You are mostly likely to be only adding a small amount of them and they are likely to be finely minced so they'll just be visible as tiny flecks or may even "disappear" depending on the recipe.
2. **Stock.** If you are using frozen vegetables that you've saved up to make stock, the solids are all going to be strained out so colour is irrelevant.
3. **Smoothies.** If you are freezing greens, cucumbers or summer squash to be used in smoothies, again, colour is less important as you are going to be grinding the greens up and they will be reduced to flecks of green.
4. **Baking.** If you are freezing grated summer squash or zucchini to be used in baking, again, colour is less important as you are going to be mixing them up and they will be reduced to flecks of green.

In these cases, and likely a few others, you can save yourself time and skip the blanching steps in the freezing process outlined on page 17 and 18.

## Roasting veggies for the freezer

Some vegetables have an enhanced and sweetened flavour once roasted. Some vegetables, like winter squash, are easier to handle if they are roasted. If that's the case you can roast them before freezing.



Some of the vegetables that you might prefer to roast are:

1. Tomatoes
2. Garlic
3. Sweet Peppers
4. Eggplant
5. Winter Squash

If you decide to roast these vegetables you can do the roasting in place of the blanching steps listed below.

## Steps to prepare veggies for the freezer

1. Wash and drain your vegetables
2. Remove any peel or skin, if needed
3. Chop, if needed
4. Boil 1-2 litres of water in a pot or steamer base on the stove.
5. Fill a large mixing bowl with ice water
6. Blanch your vegetables in 1 lb / 0.5 kg batches. You can use boiling water or steam. Start the timer immediately. I.e., for boiling water, start as soon as the vegetables are in the water not when the pot returns to a boil. Use times specified in the chart on page 18 (from University of Minnesota Extension).
7. Remove the vegetables from the boiling water and quickly plunge them into the ice bath. Stir to help stop the vegetables from cooking as quickly as possible. Don't leave them in the ice water for longer than they were in the boiling water.
- 8.
9. Once chilled, remove the vegetables from the ice-bath and spread them out on a dry, clean kitchen towel and pat them dry with another dry, clean towel.



*It's usually a good idea to chop greens before freezing*

10. Pack the vegetables into freezer bags leaving as little space as possible between vegetables. Fold over the unfilled space at the top of the bag and gently push any air out of the bag. Seal the bag.
11. Label your vegetables with the contents of the bag and the date.
12. Put them in the freezer in a single layer to allow for quick freezing. Once fully frozen you can stack them on top of each other.

## Blanching times

Vegetable	In boiling water (minutes)	In steam (minutes)
Beans	3	5
Broccoli florets (1.5" across)	-	5
Cabbage (shredded)	1.5	2.5
Carrots (small whole)	5	8
Carrots (diced, sliced or match sticks)	2	3
Eggplant	4	6
Greens	2	3
Kale (mature leaf)	3	5
Kohlrabi (cubes)	1	-
Peas (snap and snow)	2-3	-
Peas, shelling	1.5-2.5	3-5
Turnips	3	5
Zucchini and Summer Squash	3	-

# How to use frozen vegetables

The most important thing about using frozen vegetables is remembering they're there, and getting in the habit of using them. It's best to use your vegetables promptly so that they don't get freezer burn or start to take on funny flavours.

One trick for remembering to use them is to make a list of what's in the freezer, and place that list prominently somewhere in your kitchen.

You may also want to put a list of meal ideas for frozen veggies on the back side of the list so when you are stumped about what to make with your frozen veggies you have a place to turn.

Below there are a few recipe ideas to get you started.

- Quiche
- Lasagne
- Smoothies
- Chilli
- Shepherd's Pie
- Fried Rice
- Gratin
- Casseroles
- Soups
- Mac and Cheese
- Pasta sauce
- Curry
- Pasta Primavera
- Stir Fry

If anything jumps out at you from the list above, Google it and you'll find a base recipe to get you started. Then just substitute the frozen vegetables that you have on hand for the vegetables called for in the recipe.

Remember to add the frozen vegetables close to the end of cooking time where ever possible so that they don't get mushy.

In most cases, it doesn't hurt to take the vegetables out in advance and thaw them in the fridge. When you do that you can



*Frozen Kale Sausage Soup*

also drain excess water if needed. This is especially important for baking recipes like zucchini muffins.

## Conclusion

Nothing beats fresh vegetables eaten raw in their prime season. However, I hope this guide inspires you to preserve veggies in the summer when you've got an abundance. That way, you'll get to enjoy the local organic goodness in winter too.

## Acknowledgements

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