

Farmers Market Fun
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Farmers Markets open soon, filled with fresh produce, herbs, flowers and unique home-made foods. A stroll through the typical Farmers Market reveals seasonal favorites and local bounty galore. In fact, sometimes a beguiled shopper ends up with more fresh food than she can use. What to do? Preserve it, of course!

Most fruits and vegetables freeze well if properly prepared. For example, spinach and other greens need to be blanched before freezing to stop the natural action of enzymes in the food. These enzymes promote growth and maturity in the produce, and can take fresh greens from delicious to disgusting if allowed to continue working for more than 3-5 days. Blanching prevents the enzyme action from continuing and this results in a better looking and tasting finished product. The Colorado State University Extension recommends the following for fresh greens;

“Wash young, tender leaves well. Remove tough stems and imperfect parts. Cut in pieces, if desired. Water blanch tender spinach leaves 2 1/2 minutes; beet greens, kale, chard, mustard greens, turnip and mature spinach leaves 3 minutes; and collard greens 4 minutes. Cool and drain. Dry pack with headspace.”

To use the dry packing technique, simply place the blanched, drained food in a freezer bag or container. If using a bag, remove as much air as possible and leave about one inch of extra space in the bag to allow for expansion. If using a rigid container, pack the blanched, drained food in the container and leave ½ to ¾ inches free at the top for headspace (the room allowed for the food to expand).

Tray packing allows the food to be frozen individually, so that the specific amount of frozen food may be taken from the container. Place blanched, drained, chilled food in single layers on trays or pans. Place in the freezer and, when firm, remove and pack into freezer bags or freezer containers. Close and return the food to the freezer.

Our nation’s land-grant Universities provide up-to-date and accurate procedures for safe food preservation. The El Dorado County Master Food Preserver website has links to multiple resources for you to explore. Our two latest editions are complete fresh food freezing instructions, including a wonderful chart with specific information for particular fruits and vegetables, and an instruction sheet to keep fresh produce at its best. Go to http://ucanr.org/edc_mfp_links.

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including the free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.