



# Preserving nature's bounty

At this time of year, homegrown produce is abundant. Instead of letting it go to waste, you can freeze, dry or bottle it for year-round supply.

## Freezing vegetables

Freezing is a great way to preserve your bumper harvest. The quality of frozen vegetables depends on the quality of the fresh products and how they are handled from the time they are picked until they are ready to eat. Harvest vegetables in the coolest part of the morning and only use those at peak flavour and texture. Wash vegetables in cold water.

If vegetables are to be stored in the freezer long-term, blanching is recommended. Blanching slows or stops the action of enzymes that can cause loss of flavour, colour and texture. It also cleanses the surface of the vegetable, brightens the colour and helps reduce the loss of vitamins. If you're planning on eating the frozen vegetables in two to three weeks, blanching is unnecessary.

How long you blanch your vegetables varies according to the type. Most vegetables need about two to three minutes' blanching time (see table), although root crops and comcobs need four to seven minutes, depending on their size.

Underblanching can stimulate the activity of enzymes and overblanching will reduce flavour, colour, vitamins and minerals.



## Blanching

Prepare your vegetables as you would for a recipe, for example, cut broccoli into florets and trim ends of beans.

Place vegetables in a wire basket and lower into a pot of vigorously boiling water. Start timing from the moment the water returns to the boil.

As soon as blanching is complete, remove the wire basket and plunge vegetables into ice-cold water. Have a large bowl of cold

water ready. The vegetables need to be cooled as rapidly as possible to stop the cooking process. Change water frequently if it warms up. Cooling vegetables usually takes the same amount of time as blanching.

Drain the vegetables thoroughly. Extra moisture can cause a loss of quality when vegetables are frozen.

## Free flow

To prevent vegetables from freezing together in blocks, place cooled, well-drained vegetables in a single layer on a shallow tray and place in the freezer. When frozen solid, remove and pack into freezer bags. Label and date.

## When to harvest?

It's important to harvest your vegetables in cool temperatures as warmth speeds up the rate of deterioration. Pick them early morning while they're still cool and full of the night's moisture. Place them in a cool, shaded spot immediately – don't leave them sitting on the ground in full sun. Soft, leafy crops such as spinach and lettuce lose moisture rapidly once picked. If left in the sun they quickly become limp as heat accelerates water loss.

## Blanching times for prepared vegetables

Asparagus	2 minutes
Beans	2 minutes
Broccoli	3 minutes
Brussels sprouts	3 minutes
Carrots	3 minutes
Cauliflower	3 minutes
Celery	2 minutes
Corn on the cob	4-7 minutes, depending on size
Eggplant	3 minutes
Peas	1-2 minutes