

Spring Cleaning for Your Freezer

If you freeze garden produce in the summer and fall, spring is a great time to clean out your freezer to get ready to store the upcoming season's harvest.

If you have a manual-defrost freezer, defrost it at least once a year, or when there is more than a quarter inch of frost over a large area of the freezer surface.

A frost-free freezer does not need defrosting, but it still should be cleaned once a year or more often if dirt or food residues are visible. To clean, turn off the power source (unplug), empty the freezer and wipe it with a cleaning solution of one tablespoon of baking soda per quart of water. Rinse it with a cloth dipped in clean water, towel it dry and replace the food.

Use a refrigerator or freezer thermometer, and check it often to ensure that the freezer temperature stays at or below zero degrees F. Foods lose quality much more quickly at higher temperatures.

Frozen fruits and vegetables are best when used within eight to 12 months of storage at zero degrees F. After these times, the foods should be safe, though lower in quality. Place foods in the freezer into food groups for ease in locating, so you don't forget the products you have in the freezer and can enjoy the fruits of your labor at their best quality.