

Freezing Seafood At Home

Freeze seafood as soon as possible after your catch or purchase. Clean and chill fish immediately when fishing. Chill fish in ice or in the refrigerator until you are ready to freeze them. Keep crabs alive until you are ready to cook and freeze them.

Freezing Fish

1. Clean, rinse and drain fish.
2. Freeze small fish in one piece. Cut large fish into 1 inch thick steaks or fillets.
3. You can choose from several packaging methods. Packages should not be more than 1 inch thick.
 - a. Wrap fish tightly in "cling wrap" or similar moisture and vapor proof material. Keep as much air as possible out of the package. Overwrap packaged fish with freezer paper or aluminum foil to protect the "cling wrap."
 - b. Place fish in "zip-lock" plastic freezer bags. Press the bag gently to remove air, or use a straw to suck air out of bag. Seal the bag. Overwrap packaged fish with freezer paper or aluminum foil to protect the freezer bag.
 - c. Place fish in vacuum packaging bag without getting the sealing area of the bag wet. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for creating a vacuum and sealing the bag.
 - d. Place fish in 1 inch thick rigid plastic sandwich containers or milk cartons. Fill container to the top and seal. Cover the fish with water before sealing, if desired, to prevent drying or oxidation of the fish during storage.
4. Label packages with type of fish and date.
5. Freeze quickly in single layers in the freezer.

A 1 inch thick package will freeze completely in about 16 hours. Thicker packages, or packages stacked on top of each other during freezing, will take several hours longer.

Freezing Smoked Fish

1. Freeze smoked fish as soon as you remove it from the smoker.
2. If you desire, brush pieces of smoked fish with bland salad oil to slow dehydration and oxidation during frozen storage.
3. Package and freeze as described in "Freezing Fish," steps 3 (a- c), 4 and 5.

Freezing Crab

You can either freeze crabmeat in the shell or as picked crabmeat. Cook crab before freezing to prevent discoloration of the crabmeat.

1. Drop live crabs into enough boiling water to cover the crabs. Cover and return water to a boil. Boil for about 25 minutes.
2. Remove crabs from boiling water and cool them immediately in cold water. Let crabs cool for several minutes and then drain.
3. Lift off the top shell by pulling upward from the back of the crab. Rinse out the viscera under cold running water. Remove the feather-like spongy gills. Break off flap on the underside and remove the mouth parts on the end opposite the flap. Break crab in half.
4. Remove crabmeat from shell if desired. Gently pull legs from body, starting with the small ones. Break legs at joints. This pulls the cartilage free from the leg meat and helps remove meat in whole pieces. Use a kitchen mallet or nutcracker to break the claw and leg shells. Peel off the

broken pieces of shell. Pound the body sections against the inside of a pan or bowl. This loosens and releases the meat in large pieces.

5. Freeze crabmeat as described under "Freezing Fish," steps 3-5. If you plan to store frozen crabmeat longer than 4 months, use packaging method 3d to prevent drying or oxidation during storage.

Thawing Frozen Seafood

Thaw frozen seafood in the refrigerator (about 18 hours for a 1-inch thick package) or under cold running water (about 1 hour for a 1-inch thick package). Do not thaw frozen seafood at room temperature or under warm running water. Thinner parts of the seafood thaw faster than thicker parts, and the outer edges may start to spoil before the center has thawed.

Storing Frozen Seafood

Store frozen fish at 0°F or colder. The storage life of frozen seafood is longer at lower temperatures. Store frozen shellfish, fatty fish such as salmon, and smoked fish no longer than 3-4 months for best quality. Store frozen lean fish such as rockfish, sole and flounder no longer than 6-9 months.

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