

Freezing Green Chile

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Green chile, a New Mexico favorite, is a good source of vitamins A and C. Frozen at the peak of summer goodness, it can add nutrition and variety to winter meals.

Selection

Choose chile that is mature, heavy for its size, smooth and symmetrical, bright green in color, fresh, and crisp. Avoid misshapen pods, shriveled skin, mold, soft spots, and bruises.

Blistering

The tough outer skin must be removed from the chile. Blistering the skin by one of the following methods makes removal easy. The skin may then be removed before or after freezing.

Handling pungent chile can burn hands and eyes. Protect hands with a thin layer of solid fat or by wearing rubber gloves. Keep hands away from eyes while working with chile. Wash hands before and after going to the bathroom and before touching other people, such as picking up a baby. If hands are burned by chile, place them in regular vinegar to ease the stinging sensation.

Wash and dry chile. With a knife, make a small slit in the side of each chile pod to allow steam to escape. Be sure your heat source is very hot. Turn frequently to prevent scorching and ensure even blistering. Remove from heat and spread out on a flat surface in a single layer to cool before peeling. For a more crisp product, dip chile into ice water as it is removed from heat. For more thoroughly cooked chile, place in a pan and cover with a damp towel for a few minutes.

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The following are three heat-source methods for blistering chile:

Oven or broiler method—Place chiles in a hot oven or broiler at 400–450°F (205–232°C) for 6–8 minutes until skin blisters so that it can be pulled away from the flesh.

Stovetop method—Place chiles on a hot electric or gas burner after covering the burner with a layer of heavy wire mesh.

Outdoor grill method—Place chiles on a charcoal grill about 5–6 inches above glowing coals.

Commercial Chile Roasting Precautions

Commercial roasters are a convenient and economical way to handle large volumes of chile peppers. Some vendors use garbage bags to hold roasted peppers. However, this practice is dangerous because plastic polymers and chemicals such as pesticides imbedded in the plastic can be released into the peppers when the bag is exposed to heat from the peppers. Therefore, it is best to use a food-safe container such as a large roasting pan, pillowcase, or cooler/ice chest to collect roasted peppers, then transport to your home in a chilled ice chest. Transfer into smaller containers as soon as possible. Remember to place packaged, roasted peppers under refrigeration within 2 hours of exposure to heat.

Peeling After Blistering

Removal of the outer skin is easier after freezing. If freezer space permits, cooled, blistered chiles may be packed and frozen.

As the chile is peeled, either before or after freezing, slit along the sides and remove seeds and veins. Stems may be left attached for chiles rellenos.

Packaging

Pack whole, unpeeled chiles in plastic freezer bags or wrap in heavy aluminum foil or freezer wrap. Press down to remove all air and seal.

Peeled chiles, whole or diced, can be packaged in plastic bags or rigid containers of glass, metal, or plastic. Leave 1/2 inch of headspace and seal.

Freezing and Storage

Freeze chiles immediately after packing. Freeze at 0°F (-18°C) or below. Put no more food into the home freezer than will freeze within 24 hours. Usually this is about two or three pounds of food to each cubic foot of freezer capacity. For quickest freezing, place packages against freezing plates or coils and leave a little space between packages so air can circulate freely. After freezing, packages may be stored close together. Store them at 0°F (-18°C) or below. Frozen chiles should be used within 12 months.

Freezer Food Safety

Meat, poultry, fish, and eggs must be kept refrigerated at or below 40°F and frozen food at or below 0°F. If there is a power failure, maintain cold temperatures of the refrigerator and freezer by keeping doors closed as much as possible. A refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature longer than a half-full freezer for approximately 48 hours if the door remains closed. During a prolonged power outage, use dry ice or block ice. Fifty pounds of dry ice should maintain frozen temperatures for an 18-cubic foot full freezer for 2 days.

Home and commercially prepared frozen food that contains ice crystals and feels as cold as if refrigerated can be re-frozen. However, re-frozen fruit may have lower quality in flavor and texture. Frozen food that has thawed and been held above 40°F for over 2 hours can be re-frozen but should be checked for mold, yeasty smell, or sliminess. Discard any questionable product.

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