

# Healthy preservation; all you need to know about blanching vegetables

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The food preservation questions are beginning to come into the Extension Office, and each year the question is asked whether it is really necessary to “blanch” vegetables before freezing them, and the answer is Yes.

First, a few comments about freezing. Freezing is one of the easiest, most convenient, and least time-consuming methods of preserving foods. Freezing does not sterilize foods, but the extreme cold retards the growth of microorganisms and slows down chemical changes that affect quality or cause food to spoil.

Enzymes in fruits and vegetables are slowed down during freezing but are not destroyed. If not inactivated, these enzymes can cause color and flavor changes as well as loss of nutrients. And this is why blanching is so important because enzymes in vegetables are inactivated by blanching.

Blanching is a process where food is exposed to boiling water or steam for a brief period and then quickly placed in ice water to prevent it from cooking all the way through.

The amount of time needed to blanch different vegetables varies. And, it is important to follow the recommended times for specific vegetables because over-blanching leads to a loss of flavor, color and nutrients, whereas under-

Basic Blanching Chart

Vegetable	In Boiling Water (Minutes)	In Steam (Minutes)
Beans-Snap, Green, Wax	3	5
Beans-Lima, Butter, Pinto (Small)	2	3
Beans-Lima, Butter, Pinto (Medium)	3	5
Beans-Lima, Butter, Pinto (Large)	4	6
Okra (Small Pods)	3	5
Okra (Large Pods)	5	8
Peas - Field	2	2
Squash - Summer	3	5

blanching can increase enzyme activity. Check the blanching chart below for the appropriate blanching times.

Why Blanch? Here are a few reasons to blanch vegetables:

- Blanching helps to preserve the flavor, color and texture of fresh produce that's being frozen.

- Blanching helps slow the loss of vitamins.

- Blanching helps cleanse the surface of dirt and some bacteria.

Immediately following the blanching process the vegetables must then be rapidly cooled in ice water to prevent cooking. Next the blanched vegetables need to be packed in food safe, plastic freezer bags or rigid freezer containers before storing in the freezer. Allow some extra space in the container before sealing, as some items may expand when frozen.

Even though many publications on home freezing disregard the blanching method, it is essential for high quality frozen vegetables.

For a more detailed chart or to receive food preservation publications, please contact the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Rusk County, 113 East Fordall, Henderson, 903-657-0376.

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