

**POLLY'S POINTERS**



**POLLY FISHER**

**How to freeze food without ruining it**

**DEAR POLLY** — Please, what am I doing wrong? Every item I take out of my new freezer is filled with ice. The foods are in zip-style freezer bags. — **MARY**

**DEAR MARY** — I suspect that you're packing the food with too much moisture or too much air. If you're freezing vegetables, blot them dry with paper towels after blanching them. Put them in the bags, then press out as much air as possible so the bag is molded around the food.

One good way of doing this is to insert a straw in one corner of the bag, zip the bag closed up to the straw, suck out as much air as possible through the straw, then quickly remove the straw and complete the bag's seal. You could also use a vacuum meal sealer, an appliance that sucks out the air and then seals plastic bags with heat.

Meats, breads and all other foods must also be packed with as little air as possible. Sometimes this is easier to do by wrapping in plastic freezer wrap or heavy-duty foil, rather than in plastic bags.

Another possible cause of ice crystals in the food packages is repeated thawing and freezing of the food or holding the food at an incorrect temperature. Use a freezer thermometer to check that your freezer is holding at a constant temperature of 0 degrees or less. Avoid opening the freezer door more often than necessary to prevent frequent warming of the freezer by room air.

If there's a power failure, leave the freezer closed (and hopefully well packed, since a full freezer will keep the food frozen longer than a half-empty one), or fill the empty spaces with purchased dry ice if the power failure promises to be a long one.

Over time, some ice crystal formation is inevitable with home-frozen foods, but eliminating as much excess moisture and air as possible will minimize this and keep your food in good condition longer. Careful preparation techniques, packing and proper wrapping and sealing of food packages are the keys to success. — **POLLY**

**DEAR POLLY** — We are about to buy a new stove, and I can't decide whether to buy a self-cleaning range or not. Doesn't the self-cleaning feature waste a lot of electricity? — **H.T.N.**

**DEAR H.T.N.** — A few years ago, a consumer testing organization reported that self-cleaning ovens did not use significantly more electricity than manual-clean ovens, even when the self-clean feature was used regularly. This is because the self-cleaning ovens were better insulated than the regular ones, making them more efficient everyday users of electricity.

Although this report is a few years old, I assume today's self-cleaning ovens are if anything even more efficient and well-insulated. You can slightly reduce the energy needed for the self-cleaning cycle by using it when the oven is still hot from baking something; it will require slightly less energy to heat to the cleaning temperature if it has a head start.

Of course, self-cleaning ovens are more expensive to buy. I personally feel the added convenience, and being able to avoid buying and using dangerous chemical oven cleaners, is worth the extra investment. But you'll have to make your own decision based on your own budget, your cooking habits, how often you feel you need to clean your oven, the cost of electricity (or gas, if you buy a gas range) in your community, etc.

— **POLLY**

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