

Choosing a Food Preservation Method

- Freezing gives good flavor and texture, but usually still needs cooking to use, requires constant electricity, and is limited by the space in your freezer. It makes sense to use it for things like broccoli that don't can or dry well, rather than for, say, applesauce, which is just as good canned. Remember that you will need to blanch most things for a short time in hot water before freezing; you can't just stick vegetables in the freezer. Also, freezing is not forever--your product should be used within six months to a year.
- Canning gives a portable, ready-to-eat product with a very long shelf life that can be stored almost anywhere--a cupboard, closet, or even under the bed. However, it does require equipment (available at most hardware stores, and easily used), a book to tell you the proper times and temperatures, and your time.
- Drying gives a supremely portable, storable, and lightweight product. Fruit will be ready to eat; most vegetables will be best in soup after drying. It requires more labor than other methods, takes more time, and for most produce, it requires a dehydrator. (unless you live in the desert)
- Fermentation is the only storage method that actually adds nutrients to the produce instead of reducing them. It makes flavor changes that are often delicious, but are not always to everyone's taste. The product needs to be kept in a cool place. If that is not available, it must be canned or used.
- Root cellaring keeps the vegetable in its original raw, unprocessed condition by staying cold (just above freezing) and moist. Like fermentation, it is not once-and-for-all storage, but must be checked and used before spoiling. It is a larger version of the vegetable drawer in your fridge. It requires a proper place to be found or built, and the proper winter temperatures.
- Some vegetables keep well without special processing or storage. If they are harvested without bruising and kept in a dry place, many hard-shelled winter squash will last for months and months. (Cool indoor temperatures are best--I store mine under the kitchen table.) Beans and grains are dried on the plant, threshed and stored as is. (Freezing for a few days can be used to kill weevils and other eaters of stored food)