

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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January 20, 2006

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Cold Enough For You?

Not the weather, that has been cold enough recently, I'm referring to your refrigerator! How long has it been since you checked the temperature in your refrigerator and your freezer? Unless they are both cold enough your food will spoil faster and the quality will go downhill a lot faster.

If you don't have a thermometer for the refrigerator, please go invest a couple of dollars in one. You can find them in the grocery store, where the pots and pans are. It's worth the cost. Either put it on or hang it under a central shelf in the refrigerator, toward the back. If it's right in front it will warm up every time you open the door. You'll keep setting the dial down colder and colder, and pretty soon things will freeze. Hang it toward the back so you get an accurate reading. Put it in tonight, and check it tomorrow morning.

The temperature should be higher than 36° F and lower than 40° F. If it's above 40° F it will be warm enough for bacteria and molds to grow. That means that food will spoil faster. The lunch meat will get slimy sooner. The cucumbers will start showing spots of mold. And someone in your family is likely to get a "touch of stomach flu", which is just another way of saying "food poisoning".

If it's below 35° F the lettuce will freeze, then wilt. Peaches, pears and whole pineapple start turning brown inside. That's called cold chill injury, and it happens when some fruits are stored at too low a temperature. If it's really, really too cold the mayonnaise will start to separate and turn oily.

Either way, too warm or too cold, it's wasting your food, your electricity and your money. And it might be making you sick! So, adjust the dial, up or down, leave it sit overnight, and check it again tomorrow. Keep doing that until the thermometer stays between 36° and 40° F.

Once you have the refrigerator adjusted, check the freezer. The temperature in the freezer should be at or below 0° F. Don't just think that as long as the ice cubes are solid the freezer is cold enough. Put the thermometer in there and check it overnight, just like you did the refrigerator.

Water will make ice cubes at 32° F. It's true that bacteria won't grow at 32° F, but the quality of your frozen food will not last as long. If the freezer is 20° F instead of zero there will be more freezer burn. That means meat will be tougher when you cook it. Some salty meats like bacon or ham might start tasting strong or rancid. Frozen fruit and vegetables can get brown or mushy. Bread or baked goods will get dry on the inside with lots of ice crystals on the outside.

If the freezer is not at 0° ice cream will be soft, maybe even runny depending on its ingredients. Ice cream made with just sugar might be hard, but ice cream made with corn syrup will be soft. The more corn syrup in the recipe the softer the ice cream. (Does that give you an idea about how soft serve ice creams stay soft?) Reduced sugar ice cream made with one sugar substitute might be very hard but one using a different sweetener might be soft.

When the refrigerator stays at 48° F and the freezer stays at 0° F your food will be safer and will taste much better for a much longer time. That saves you money and keeps you healthier. Take the time, and check the temperature today!

Here's a super-quick dessert that depends on a freezer that's cold enough to

keep the fruit frozen solid. A 'granité' is usually frozen, flavored sugar water. This one is made with fruit, much more healthy! Use some fresh Plant City strawberries, or buy a bag all ready frozen. Garnish with more fresh berries, and a mint leaf for extra color.

Enjoy!

Banana-Berry Granité

2 ripe bananas

2 cups strawberries

3 Tbsp no-sugar-added strawberry jam

1 Tbsp warm water

Peel and slice the bananas. Put in plastic bag and freeze until solid. Wash the berries, remove the caps, and freeze in plastic bag until solid. Ten minutes before serving time put frozen fruit in bowl of food processor. Let stand until they soften just a little. Add jam and water. Take the plunger out of the processor (so that air gets mixed into the fruit) and process until the mixture is smooth. Scrape the sides of the bowl down often. Serve immediately. If you have leftovers, freeze them. Serves 4-5.

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