

PENNY SAVER NEWS

pennysavernews@aol.com

FAX: 932-5261

Sept 13, 2012

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

Keeping Your Seafood

If you spent the weekend enjoying the bounty our waters have to offer, hopefully you had good luck and a great catch! If your refrigerator is full of fresh fish or other seafood right now, happy eating! But if there's more than you can manage to use in the next day or two, get busy now to save it for future dinners. Whether you catch or buy your seafood, it's always better quality if it's frozen while it's closest to fresh possible.

Seafood is generally more tender than other meats. After all, those shrimp didn't have to carry their bodies around a pasture on great big bones! While that makes for good eating, it also means that seafood can come out of the freezer mushy and soft, or develop some strong or strange flavors if it's not frozen properly.

Not only do you want to get your seafood into the freezer as quickly as possible, you want it to freeze as quickly as possible. That means making sure that there's enough room in the freezer for good air circulation, and that adding several packages of fresh food are not going to warm up the other foods. Turn the temperature control dial as low as it will go the day before the fish goes into the freezer. Then after it is frozen solid, return the dial to its normal position. The extra chill will mean better quality later.

Slow freezing makes big ice crystals in the food. Those large crystals will break open the cells. When the food thaws, all the juice will come dripping out, and the food itself will be soft and mushy. Freezing in smaller batches and smaller containers also speeds up the freezing process.

The other factor that really affects flavor in frozen seafood is air. Using good, tight, made for freezing wrapping or containers is important for all frozen foods. But since seafood has a more delicate flavor, off-flavors and oxidation can be more easily noticed. So, don't use just any old plastic bag or wrap. Make sure it's freezer-weight. Foil is not a good choice because it doesn't seal as tightly and is punctured or torn more easily. Wrap or bag the foods tightly, squeezing out as much air as you can.

Or, use ice to make the seal. This is the old-timer's trick for freezing fish. Cover a tray with waxed paper. Prepare the fish, either whole or fillets. Lay them out on the tray and freeze until solid. Then dip them one by one into a pan of ice water. A little lemon juice in the water will help keep the white fish whiter. Return to the freezer. Repeat this several times until there's a good coat of ice around the fish. Wrap in plastic or seal in plastic freezer bags, seal tightly, date and freeze.

Shrimp will be better after a similar treatment, but no, you don't have to dip each shrimp individually! Remove the heads and wash the shrimp. Leave the shells on for extra protection from air. Lay them on a tray, or pack into containers or plastic bags. Freeze until solid. Transfer loose shrimp to containers or bags. Either fill the bags or containers with water, or add a little water and slosh it around to cover the shrimp. Freeze again. Repeat with the little water several times, until all the shrimp have a coat of ice.

Lump crab meat also benefits from this method. Freeze it dry first, then cover with water in the container and freeze again. Oysters can be placed individually in the sections of an ice cube tray, covered with water and frozen. Clams can be washed, packed in small containers and covered directly with water.

Finally, remember that seafood does not have the same storage life as other frozen meats. For best quality, plan on using it within 3-4 months. The longer it's frozen the poorer the flavor and texture are likely to be.

Here's an unusual way to serve snapper, a delicious and juicy fish. This might even convince the folks who think they don't like fish to smile! Other white fish can be used if all the snapper has been eaten.

Snapper and Spaghetti in a Dish

2 cups cooked, flaked snapper	1 4-oz can mushrooms
1 Tbsp all-purpose flour	2 Tbsp margarine
Salt, pepper to taste	1 ¼ cups low fat milk
1 cup grated Cheddar cheese	2 Tbsp chopped pimento
2 cups cooked spaghetti	1 cup dry bread crumbs
2 Tbsp margarine, melted	

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray or oil a 1 ½ quart baking dish. Drain mushrooms, saving the liquid. Melt margarine in large saucepan. Gradually stir in flour, salt and pepper until smooth. Stir in milk and liquid from mushrooms until smooth. Cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Add fish, mushrooms, cheese and pimento. Layer half spaghetti in baking dish, then half the fish mixture. Repeat with rest of spaghetti and fish. Combine crumbs and melted margarine, sprinkle over casserole. Bake for 15-20 minutes, until heated through and bubbling. Serves 6.