

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Brrrr! It's Been Cold Out There!

Anyone who's been here for the last couple of months knows that this has been much colder than our normal December weather. And while we didn't need to add antifreeze to our cars, we couldn't give antifreeze to our plants. If you didn't get your tender potted plants inside or covered, they're probably drooping now. But, what about our fruits and veggies? Did you pick all the oranges or lemons you could reach to save them from the cold? Did you have tomatoes on vines that look a little brown around the edges? Now what can you do with them?

While the Horticulture folks say that most citrus fruit would have been okay if left on the trees, a lot of it was picked. That's okay too, as long as it is sweet enough for you. But most of us can't use several bags of oranges before they start to shrivel, or worse to get moldy. To save them, throw them in the freezer!

All you need to do is wash and dry them. You can put them in large freezer-weight plastic bags, or in freezer containers. When you're ready to use them, put them in the refrigerator a day or two ahead of time to thaw out. You can juice them or slice them once they're thawed.

If you happen to enjoy old-fashioned orange or lemon marmalade you'll find that it's much easier to slice the fruit very thinly when it's still frozen. Overnight thawing in the refrigerator leaves them just crispy enough to slice easily

The juice from frozen fruit will taste just fine, actually probably better than if you juiced them first. Many people find to their dismay that all the juice they squeezed and

froze comes out of the freezer tasting very bitter. That's because it's hard for us to get the juice without getting some of the oils from the skin. In the freezer these oils get stronger and more bitter, and there's no way to get them out or cover them up. By juicing them after they've been frozen there's little chance for them to get bitter, so the juice stays sweet.

Plus, after the fruit has been frozen, you'll actually get more juice from the fruit. The ice crystals that formed inside broke up the little juice sacs. When the fruit is thawed and squeezed more juice can drip out. Yum, yum!

The big disadvantage with freezing whole citrus fruit is that they do take up a lot of space in the freezer. So this only works if you have the freezer space. If you leave them for months and months they will start to show some freezer burn. There will be frost inside the bag and the fruit will start to get dry. But you'll be smart and use them before that happens, right?

Tomatoes are one of the more delicate vegetables (yes, they're actually fruit too, but we use them like a vegetable). After a frost a nice, round, red, juicy tomato can still look perfectly fine. But inside, the frosting has caused chemical changes. Tomatoes that have been frosted have lost some of their acid. That's not a problem if you want to cook or freeze them, but they are no longer safe to be canned. If the leaves on the vine have browned or drooped, do not try to can those tomatoes.

You could freeze whole tomatoes, just like the citrus if you're pressed for time. But if you want, take all those frosted tomatoes and make a couple batches of home made spaghetti sauce. Go easy on the salt and spices, but cook it until it's thick. Chill the pan in ice water until it's cold, then pack it in meal-sized amounts and freeze. When

you need a quick dinner thaw out a container, reheat and adjust the spices. Don't add all the seasoning at the beginning because some flavors get strong or change when they're frozen. Here's a way to freeze stewed tomatoes for a quick dinner in the future.

Stewed Tomatoes for the Freezer

6 large tomatoes

2 Tbsp chopped celery

½ tsp salt

2 tsp sugar

Wash, peel and quarter the tomatoes directly into a large heavy pot. Cook them over low heat about 20 minutes. Add the celery, salt and sugar. Set the pan in a sink or larger pan of ice water and stir until the tomatoes are cool. Pack in freezer containers, label and freeze. Be sure to leave 1 inch of space in the container. To use, thaw the tomatoes, add 1 tsp minced onion, ¼ tsp paprika and heat. Taste to see if more celery is needed. Thicken with ½ cup bread crumbs. Add 1 Tbsp margarine. Serves 4.