

Leftovers and freezing

Easy · 10 min · Freezer bags or containers

Get leftovers in the fridge within 2 hours, in shallow containers. Eat them within 3 to 4 days or freeze them. Freeze in labeled, dated, meal-size portions at 0°F, use the oldest first, thaw in the fridge, and reheat to 165°F.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Shallow containers or freezer bags
- ☐ A food thermometer
- ☐ Freezer tape or a marker

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Cool it fast.** Never leave perishable food out more than 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F. Split big batches into shallow containers so they chill quickly.
- 2 **Eat or freeze within 3 to 4 days.** Leftovers keep 3 to 4 days in the fridge. Frozen, they stay safe indefinitely, but taste best within 3 to 4 months.
- 3 **Pack it right.** Cool food before packing, use bags and containers made for freezing, and leave room for food to expand.
- 4 **Label everything: what it is, the date, and how many servings.** Freeze in meal-size servings in see-through containers so you can see what you have.
- 5 **Keep the freezer at 0°F or colder, don't overload it with warm food, and leave space around new packages until they freeze.**
- 6 **First in, first out.** Put older food in front and use it first. Check your leftovers when you plan the week's meals.
- 7 **Thaw safely and reheat.** Thaw in the fridge, in cold water or in the microwave, never on the counter. Reheat leftovers to 165°F.

Watch out Some foods turn bad in texture when frozen: raw salad greens and cucumbers go limp, plain cooked pasta or rice gets mushy, mayonnaise and sour cream separate, and fried foods get soggy. They're safe, just unpleasant.

DAD NOTE *Your freezer is a savings account for food. Label it and date it, or it turns into a drawer full of mystery bricks.*

Full lesson: apkeys.com/your-place/cooking-on-a-budget/leftovers-and-freezing/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture; National Center for Home Food Preservation; Iowa State University Extension; FoodSafety.gov.