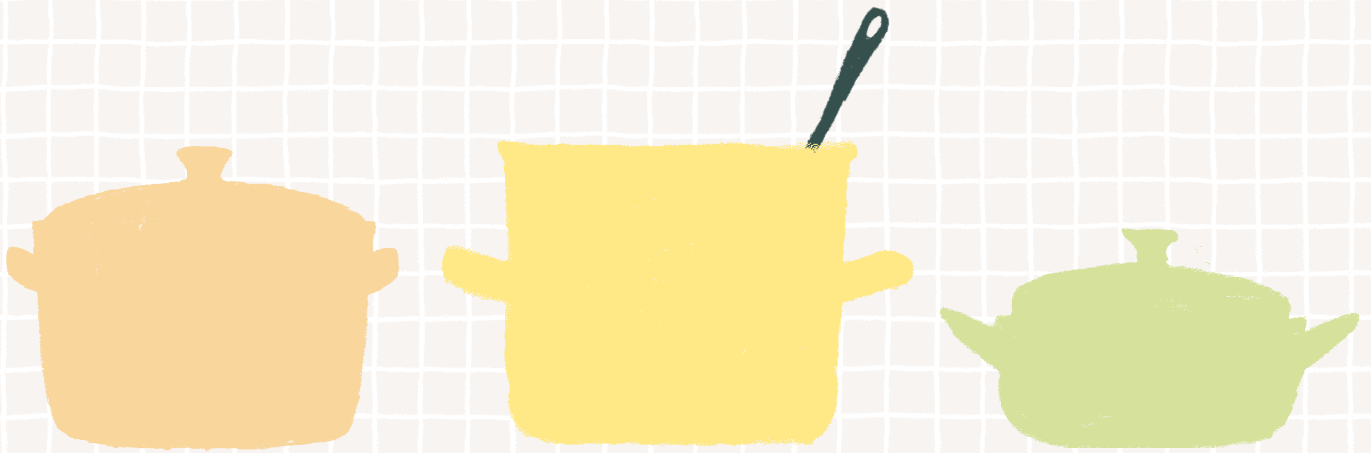


The COOK

Guide to

Batch Cooking



## As the nation's experts in batch cooking for the freezer, **COOK** shows you how to save time and money by making healthy, nutritious home-cooked frozen meals.

If you're looking for a healthier, quicker and slightly cheaper way of enjoying delicious home-cooked food, then batch cooking for the freezer could be for you. It involves cooking larger batches of meals and then freezing some for later, ideally in separate portions. Buying ingredients in bulk is invariably cheaper. Having meals to hand in the freezer means you don't have to cook from scratch every night, saving you time. And keeping your recipes healthy and nutritious means you're not tempted by takeaways, or speedy unhealthy options. **So, batch-it-up to save money and time while ensuring a healthier diet for you and your family.**

At COOK, we've built an award-winning business on the back of batch cooking. So, if you want to know how to batch-it-up, you've come to the right place. Twenty-five years of practice means there's nothing we don't know about batch cooking for the freezer.

In fact, the inspiration for the business came from Anne Perry – the mother of COOK co-founder, Ed. As a busy working mum with four children, she was always pushed for time but also determined to get the family round the table for a home-cooked meal every night. The solution was batch cooking at weekends, **making enough for one supper then freezing the extra for another day.** It meant, even when she was in a rush, there was always a home-cooked meal at hand in the freezer.

Ed took that idea and, with his co-founder Dale, turned it into a business. Their founding statement in 1997 was: to COOK using the same ingredients and techniques as a good cook would use at home, so everything looks and tastes homemade. That principle remains to this day, with nearly 100 COOK shops nationwide.

So, here's everything we know about batch cooking for your freezer ...

# How To Approach Batch Cooking



## 1. Be prepared

- Create some space in the freezer
- Make sure you've got pans big enough for larger quantities
- Make sure you have the correct bags or containers to freeze the food in. Not all plastic is freezer proof – some kinds go brittle at low temperatures and can shatter. So check you've got either glass or good quality plastic containers that can be reused. Reusable freezer bags are great for sauces – freezing them flat also helps with space as you can stack them on top of each other. Muffin trays are also useful if you want to defrost smaller portions at a time.
- Cool the food quickly after cooking and before freezing. One way of doing this is to split the food out into smaller portions.

## 2. Choose your “base” recipes

One of the simplest ways to approach batch cooking is to make one base recipe which can be adapted into different dishes. There's no need to eat the same thing all week – you can freeze the base in portions and then defrost and use in different dishes.

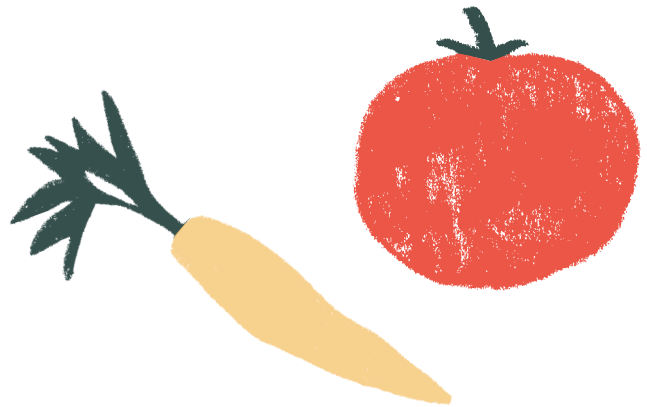
Take a classic Bolognese, with minimal effort it can be used for: a Cottage Pie, a Chilli, a Lasagne as well as a good old Spag Bol.

## BATCH COOKING RECIPE: BOLOGNESE SAUCE

Serves 6-8

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, trimmed and finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves finely chopped
- 600g mince – we like 2/3 (450g) beef mince and 1/3 (150g) pork mince. A higher fat content will always give more flavour too
- 800g chopped tomatoes
- 1 small pack basil, finely chopped
- 3 tbsp tomato purée
- 180g sundried tomato paste
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 beef stock cube
- 235ml red wine
- Salt & cracked black pepper, to taste



### METHOD

1. Put a large saucepan on a medium heat and add 1 tbsp olive oil.
2. Add the onions, carrots and garlic cloves and fry on a medium heat for 10 mins, without colouring. Stir the veg regularly until it softens.
3. Increase the heat to medium-high, add the mince and stir often for 3-4 mins until the meat is browned all over.
4. Add the chopped tomatoes, sundried tomato paste, bay leaves, tomato purée, beef stock and red wine. Bring to the boil, reduce to a gentle simmer and cover with a lid. Cook for 1 hr stirring occasionally until you have a rich, thick sauce. If the sauce is overly thick add a little water to loosen. Season with salt and pepper to taste and add the freshly chopped basil.



For a **Spaghetti Bolognese**, simply cook up some spaghetti, dish the sauce on top, some grated parmesan, a sprinkle of extra chopped parsley and some warmed, crusty garlic bread.



To make a **chilli**, simply add 2tsp of chilli powder, 2tsp smoked paprika, 2 tsp ground cumin to the vegetables once softened. Substitute the red wine with water and remove the sundried tomato paste. Substitute the chopped basil with chopped coriander. Drain and rinse a 410g can of red kidney beans in a sieve and stir them into the sauce 10 minutes before the end of the cooking time. To make the chilli extra special, stir through 25g of dark chocolate at the end. Serve with soured cream, a jacket potato and sliced fresh chillies



To make a **lasagne**, you'll need to make a cheese sauce as well. To do this, bring 1 litre of milk to the boil in a thick bottomed saucepan and then switch off. Melt 100g of butter in another saucepan, then add 100g of plain flour. Stir continuously until a paste forms – this is called a roux. Continue cooking for 2 mins. Add the milk to the roux gradually, stirring as you go, until you get a smooth sauce. Add 50g of grated mature cheddar, 1tsp of English mustard and the juice from half a lemon, mixing well through the sauce. Cook for 5-10 mins, stirring continuously, until the sauce has thickened.

To assemble your lasagne, spread a third of the bolognese sauce into the bottom of a large ceramic baking dish followed with a drizzle of cheese sauce. Put a layer of dried lasagne sheets on top and repeat twice. Finish with a thick layer of cheese sauce evenly spread across the dish. Sprinkle with enough grated mature cheddar to cover the top. Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/Gas 6. Bake the lasagne in the oven for 35-40 mins or until bubbling and golden brown. Allow to stand for 10 minutes before serving. Serve with a fresh green salad and some crusty garlic bread.

Another great batch cooking recipe is a Chicken, Ham and Leek base. This can be turned into a pie by adding a pastry lid, or served with mash and veg on the side, or simply stirred through pasta.

## BATCH COOKING RECIPE: CHICKEN, HAM & LEEK PIE

Serves 6-8

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 800g boneless skinless free range chicken breasts, diced
- 60g butter
- 1 medium leek, trimmed, washed and finely sliced
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 60g plain white flour
- 100ml white wine
- 400ml chicken stock
- 300ml double cream
- 300ml semi-skimmed milk
- Salt & cracked black pepper, to season
- 1 lemon, juice only
- 1 small bunch of fresh parsley, chopped
- 4 slices of thick cut cured ham, cut into strips or chunks



### METHOD

1. Heat half the oil in a large frying pan and cook the chicken for about 10 mins until cooked. Set aside.
2. Heat the remaining oil and butter and add the onions. Soften for 2-3 mins. Add the leeks and cook for a further 2 mins. Add the wine and reduce by half, then stir in the flour.
3. Slowly pour in the chicken stock, milk and cream and bring up to the boil, stirring continuously. Take off the heat, stir in the lemon juice, chopped parsley and season to taste.
4. Add the chicken and ham into the sauce and mix well.



If making a **pie**, unroll 500g pastry and cut off a small strip for any decorations. Roll the remainder to fit a pie dish. Put the filling in the dish and place the pastry on top. Use a fork to crimp the edges and press the pastry to the edge of the dish. Make a small hole in the centre to allow the steam to escape (no one likes a soggy pastry lid!). Brush with a beaten egg and sprinkle over some chopped thyme (optional). Bake in a 200C/180C fan/Gas 6 oven for 20-25mins or until golden and piping hot (this will take longer if cooking from chilled).



It's easy to switch this up by using different pastry – **shortcrust and puff are very traditional, but for a lighter twist, use filo pastry** and scrunch on top of the pie. Just brush lightly with rapeseed oil instead of a beaten egg.

Alternatively, make a **potato topped pie**. Chill the mix and top with mashed potato. Fork the top and bake in a 200C/180C fan/Gas 6 oven for 25-30mins or until golden and piping hot.



If serving with **pasta**, simply cook the desired amount of pasta and add to the bubbling hot chicken, ham and leek mix.

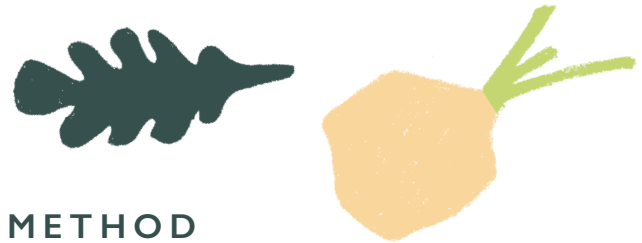
# VEGETARIAN BATCH COOKING RECIPE:

## HEARTY VEGGIE CASSEROLE

Serves 6-8

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tbsp olive or rapeseed oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 5 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
- 2 sticks of celery, washed & roughly chopped
- 4 tbsp tomato puree
- 4 tbsp sundried tomato paste
- 300ml vegetable stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 glass of dry white wine (approx. 200ml)
- 800g tin chopped tomatoes
- 100g kale, washed and roughly chopped
- 2 large red peppers
- 2 large yellow peppers
- 800g cannellini beans, drained
- 1 small bunch of parsley, roughly chopped
- Salt and cracked black pepper, to taste



### METHOD

1. To roast the peppers, heat the oven to 200°C and line a large, flat baking tray with baking paper. Cut the peppers into 1cm thick slices, toss in a little oil and arrange on the tray. Roast for 20-25mins and set to one side.
2. Whilst the peppers are **roasting**, heat a tbsp of oil in a large casserole dish over a medium heat. Add the onions and bay leaf, sauté for 2-3 mins, then add the garlic and celery. Cook for a further 5 mins until the vegetables start to soften.
3. Stir in the wine and bubble for 2 minutes. Add the oregano, chopped tomatoes, tomato puree, sundried tomato paste, vegetable stock and simmer for 20 mins until thickened. Stir in the drained beans and lightly simmer for a further 10 mins.
4. Once the casserole is cooked, stir through the kale and roasted peppers and cook for a further 3-4 mins until the kale has slightly softened. Add  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the chopped parsley, salt and pepper to taste, mixing well. If the casserole is overly thick, add a little water to achieve the desired consistency. Sprinkle the remaining parsley across the top and serve.





**Go Greek!** Add ½ tsp dried chilli flakes when adding the white wine plus a handful of green olives and 1tbsp of capers when adding the kale. Before sprinkling the parsley, cut 2 x 225g packs of halloumi into ½ cm slices and evenly spread across the top of the casserole dish and grill until golden brown.

Sprinkle with the remaining chopped parsley and the zest of half a lemon and drizzle with some extra virgin olive oil.



For a **Spanish vibe**, add a large can of butterbeans, 2-4 tsp of smoked paprika and 2 tsp of ground cumin when adding the white wine to the casserole. Cover the cooked casserole with a lid to keep warm.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Cut a medium sourdough loaf into thick slices, removing the crusts. Cut the crustless slices into large rustic cubes. Crush and finely chop two cloves of garlic, zest half a lemon and combine with a large glug of olive oil. Toss the bread in the garlicky oil and sprinkle with salt and cracked black pepper. Scatter the pieces on to an oven tray and bake for 8-10 mins or until the croutons are browned and crunchy.

Once cooked, add the remaining chopped parsley to the piping hot casserole and scatter the croutons on top before serving.



Turn it into a **show stopping pie** with a crunchy filo topping. Follow the steps above but don't cook the kale or top with parsley. Preheat the oven to 200°C and unroll six sheets of filo pastry. Lightly brush one side with oil, scrunch up and lay on top of the casserole, covering completely. Bake for 10-15 mins in the middle of the oven until the pastry is golden and crisp all over. Once cooked, drizzle with virgin olive oil and sprinkle across the remaining chopped parsley.



# How To Best Manage Your Sub-Zero Space

**If you're going to be embarking on a batch cook-athon, then you'll want to become good friends with your freezer.**

We've been freezing food for a living for 25 years, so there's not much we don't know about making the most of your freezer. Whilst freezing food is an easy thing to do, it's not quite fool proof. Here are our top 10 tips:

**1. Make sure your freezer's set to the right temperature.** Sounds obvious, but it's worth checking – not only because it will help keep food for longer, but because it could also help you win a pub quiz, as it's apparently one of the most frequently asked questions! So here goes, the winning answer...


The UK Food Standards Agency suggests **the correct freezer temperature to safely store frozen goods is -18°C.**

Boring, but it's worth remembering that freezers with good, intact seals will use less energy and keep a lower temperature.

**2. Cool foods before you freeze them.** Freezing food when hot will raise the freezer temperature, making it less efficient (more costly) and potentially cause other foods to start defrosting, compromising the safety of them.

**3. Freeze fresh.** As with so many things in life, you get out what you put in. The cold temperatures of a domestic freezer mean the processes of decay become glacially slow. But freezing won't actually kill bacteria, they may be revived as the food defrosts. So, if it goes in bad, it'll come out bad.

**4. Don't freeze and forget!** In Siberia, people have been known to cook and eat woolly mammoth pulled from the permafrost (at least according to the internet). And while it probably didn't taste as good as it did during the Ice Age, it was apparently still edible! However, freezing doesn't prevent taste and texture from deteriorating for ever. **Write the date of freezing on your bags or containers** so they don't become UFOs (Unidentified Frozen Objects). As a rough guide, foods can be safely kept in your home freezer for 3 to 12 months without loss of quality. Of course, maximum keeping times vary depending on the food and how they've been processed prior to freezing.



**5. Keep your freezer full.** A full freezer retains cold better than an empty one. When you open the door, the mass of frozen food will help keep in the cold, and the unit won't have to work as hard to cool empty space so it's more economical to run. If you have lots of space free, fill the freezer with everyday items you're bound to use, such as sliced bread or frozen peas.

**But don't jam pack the freezer either** - you need air to circulate.

**6. Wrap up.** If food is exposed to the very cold air inside your freezer, the frozen water will migrate to the outside of the food and turns into water vapour. This causes something called 'freezer burn' - not very appetizing patches on a steak for example, that can affect the quality. To avoid, make sure you **wrap foods properly**, pushing out as much air as you can before sealing, or put them in sealed containers.

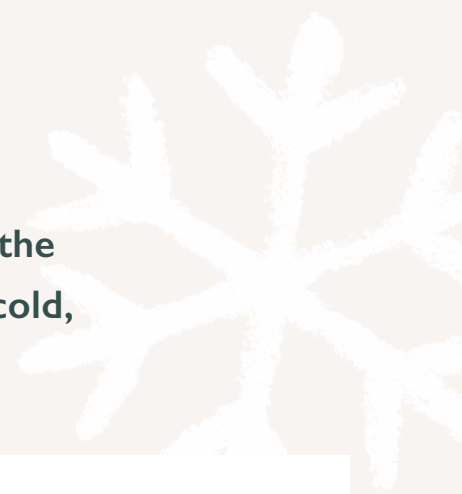
**7. Space to grow.** Liquid will expand, so don't freeze it in the bottle or you risk the glass shattering. It's easy to decant into small sealable containers, leaving a little room at the top for expansion. With plastic milk cartons, you may need to pour a bit away before freezing to **make sure there's space for the liquid to grow.**

**8. Keep it clean.** A clean freezer devoid of icebergs is the most efficient. If necessary, it may need defrosting. If you've gone through life managing to avoid doing this until now...then don't worry, it's not as tedious as it sounds! Here's a quick and easy "how to...":

<https://www.which.co.uk/reviews/freezers/article/how-to-defrost-your-freezer-azsKu5W4a6nH>

**9. Thawing out.** Once you've drilled through and successfully extracted something from the icy depths of your freezer, the safest way to defrost it is to put it on a plate and allow it to slowly thaw in the fridge for 24 hours (48 hours for large items such as meat joints or frozen poultry). **Don't defrost at room temperature** – food must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing.

**10. Only refreeze food if you're cooking it in between.** When food is thawed bacteria can multiply quickly, particularly at room temperature. If you pop it back in the freezer, the bacteria survive and are more likely to reach harmful levels on second thawing. However, if you cook the food in between eg thawing beef mince, using it to make a bolognaise and then refreezing, it's not a problem as the bacteria will have been killed off in the cooking process. (Just remember to fully reheat foods after their second freezing too).



**No longer an “unfashionable” preservation method, the freezer is officially cool again. Here are some of the cold, hard facts explaining why...**

### **Fresh from the freezer**

When you buy “fresh” fruit and veg at the supermarket, the description can be misleading. Many supermarket vegetables are stored for weeks as it can take some time to sort, transport and distribute harvested produce to shops. During this time, vitamins and minerals can be slowly lost from the food through oxidation. On the other hand, frozen vegetables get picked, washed and blanched within the hour - they are frozen in peak condition, soon after harvesting and so can often be higher in nutrients than their “fresh” counterparts.

**Freezing is nature’s pause button, locking in the nutrients found in food.**

### **Guardians of goodness**

Research shows that if done properly, **freezing is the best method of food preservation** to lock in micronutrients, including proteins, vitamins and minerals.

### **Frozen assets**

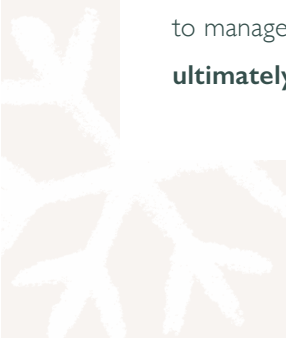
The cost of food waste is not only hurting the planet, our bank accounts are suffering too. By embracing your freezer and all the great ingredients that can be stored within it, it’ll be much easier to manage portion sizes and **reduce waste, ultimately reducing your groceries bill.**

### **Free from the nasty stuff**

Freezing is a great way of preserving food because you don’t have to use chemical preservatives. Frozen products don’t need added preservatives because microorganisms don’t grow when the temperature of the food is below  $-9.5\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ ; it’s just being frozen in time until you are hungry. **Freezing is one of the oldest, simplest and purest means of preserving foods, it’s an entirely natural process.**

### **Give waste the cold shoulder**

Roughly one third of all the food produced for human consumption across the world is wasted every year with food waste known to be responsible for 6% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Trewin Restorick, chief executive of environmental charity Hubbub, said: “If food waste was a country, it would be the world’s third biggest contributor to climate change”. As we struggle to feed the world’s growing population, whilst protecting the world itself, it’s never been more important to tackle food waste, and frozen food can play a crucial role in this challenge. BFFF (British Frozen Food Federation) research has shown that **switching from fresh to frozen can actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions.**



# Freeze This, Not That

**When it comes to freezing, very little gets a flat no. Freezers are almost all-embracing, throwing their doors open to much of what comes their way. BUT, we all have our limits.**

Freezing can damage some foods because ice crystals form and can tear the cell membranes. This doesn't necessarily mean it's not safe, but the food loses its crispness or firmness. It explains why commercial freezing (the way we do it at COOK) is done very rapidly, so that the ice crystals that form are smaller, and cause less damage to cell membranes meaning the overall quality is less affected.

Here are a few of the ground rules...what is / isn't on the freezer guest list.

## Veggies

The secret lies in **blanching vegetables** in boiling water before freezing. It's a quick and easy technique that preserves the flavour, texture and colour by removing surface bacteria and enzymes that cause spoilage and deteriorate the quality. All you do is immerse the veg in a large pan of boiling water for 1-2min until just slightly softened, then immediately drain and plunge into a large bowl of freezing cold water. Drain and dry on a bit of kitchen towel before freezing.

You can do a similar thing with potatoes to give yourself perfect freeze ahead roasties – one of life's great cheats! Parboil (rather than blanche) in salted water for about 6 minutes, then drain and toss them about a bit in a colander to rough up the sides. Shake over a bit of flour, salt and pepper; spoon over a bit of fat; lay the potatoes on a tray lined with baking parchment and freeze. When you're ready to use them - when people are starving, but you're starved of time - just add a bit more fat and shove them straight in a pre-heated oven. Job done.

Chopped onions are also handy to have portioned up in the freezer, for much the same reason. Chop or slice the onions and freeze them raw on trays. Once hard, tip them into a freezer bag so they don't all stick together.

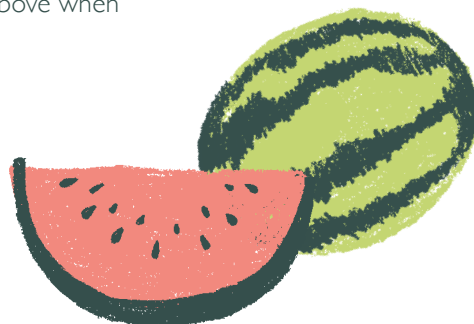
Vegetables you enjoy crisp, that have a high water content, such as celery, lettuce, cucumber, radishes and bean sprouts will end up limp and mushy, so these are best eaten from the fridge not freezer. Oh, and mushrooms aren't great frozen either.



## Fruit

With a lot of fruit, the flavour preserves well, but not the texture. Reason being, that fruit is around 95 per cent water and most fruits have thin skins and become mushy when frozen. However, this doesn't matter a jot when using it for smoothies, coulis, cooking and, most importantly, margaritas. **By using frozen fruit straight from the freezer, it can replace the ice.** Follow the blanching technique above when freezing fruit to ensure the quality stays as good as possible.

Conveniently, you can freeze whole bananas in their skins - again, great for smoothies. Apples can be peeled, sliced, frozen, placed in airtight containers and used in pies or crumble. Alternatively, you can stew with sugar and use to top porridge (which can also be frozen) or muesli. Freeze pears, apricots and plums the same way.



## Dairy

Milk in cartons can be frozen (for about a month) unopened if there is a gap between the milk and the lid – **all liquids expand as they freeze**, so if there isn't enough room, the lid might pop off or the carton could split. Defrost in the fridge and shake well before using.

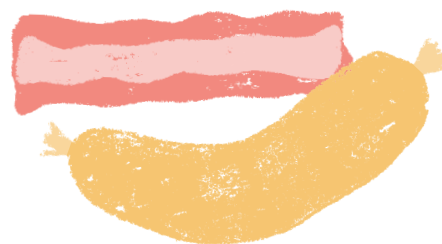
Butter's also fine to freeze for a few months, but cheese is a bit more complicated. Hard cheese (eg cheddar, parmesan and firm blues) can generally handle freezing, in fact grated cheese can be frozen for up to 4 months and can be used straight from the freezer. However, the high water content of soft cheeses such as brie and camembert results in a weird (just weird, not weird and wonderful) texture when defrosted! So as not to waste though, **softer cheeses could be used in a lasagne or a sauce and then frozen.**

Yoghurt and cream can be frozen but will need a good stir once defrosted as foods with higher fat contents, tend to separate when frozen.



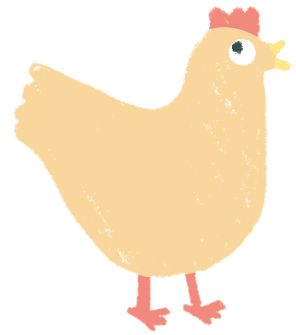
## Meat

Meat is generally fine to freeze, especially in curries or stews. Where the sauce is the main flavour, it's almost impossible to detect if the beef or chicken breasts used were frozen. Just **make sure that it is vacuum sealed so that the meat's protected** from freezer burn.



## Poultry

You don't ever want to fall fowl (sorry!) of a piece of chicken or turkey that has gone bad, so it's a really good idea to **label up poultry**. A tightly wrapped whole chook will last a year in the freezer. Turkey will be good for seven months and duck, with its high fat content, six months. But if you only have the various parts of the bird (thighs, wings, breasts etc) then they should only stay in your freezer for nine months. For cooked poultry though, you need to take it out of your freezer within six months.



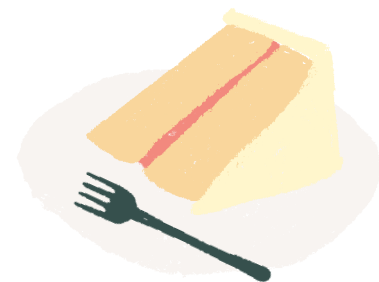
## Fish

Well, this depends on what your catch of the day is...lean fish, such as cod, haddock, hake, plaice, and sole can be kept frozen for about six months. On the other hand, fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel and tuna, can only be kept frozen for a couple of months. Again, **make sure it's vacuum-sealed, as air will destroy it.**



## Baked goods

When it comes to freezing, sugar is your friend. Sugar helps keep cakes' texture. Sugar, however, can also pick up other aromas, so make sure **baked cakes are tightly sealed.**



# Let's call it a (freezer) wrap...

**If you stock your freezer with the right foods in the right way, you can eat better and stress less because there will always be something homemade to put on the table.**

Batch-cooking can be a real dining saviour, a secret weapon to pull out when the munchies attack or friends / family invade. Bulk cook and batch-it-up so that **your time in the kitchen counts for more**, meals go further, and you can enjoy the fruits of your labour for weeks and months to come.