

## Freezing Home-Cooked Beans

Beans

There's no denying that cooking beans takes a while. There are two ways of getting around this. One is to buy canned beans, which are cooked. But they have disadvantages:

- They give you no control over texture. Although many people like the extremely soft texture of canned beans, they come that way and that way only.
- You'll never get the same beany flavor as you do from dried, and the canning liquid is never as delicious as your own cooking liquid.
- Only the most common types of beans are available in cans.
- They are relatively expensive.
- They range wildly in quality (some are pretty bad).

You're much better off freezing cooked beans. Most of the recipes here start with 1 pound of beans, which makes 6 to 8 servings. This is my general practice, so I can refrigerate or freeze what I don't immediately need (usually

about half). It takes literally seconds of extra work. You can, of course, make half a recipe if you prefer. But if you get in the habit of cooking a pound of dried beans at a time, you'll find that canned beans become an afterthought, a staple of last resort.

▶ To freeze, let the cooked beans cool in their liquid, then put beans and liquid into plastic containers with tight-fitting lids or zipper bags. Put in a splash of white vinegar or lemon juice if you want to help keep the beans intact, then cover and refrigerate for up to 5 days or freeze for up to 6 months. (As with all frozen foods, you're better off using them sooner.) Thaw for a day or so in the fridge, thaw in the microwave, or put the block of beans and liquid in a covered pan with a little water over medium-low heat (check occasionally to make sure they have enough water, but don't overstir or try to break up the ice block or the beans will break into bits). Generally beans can go from frozen to hot in less than 30 minutes.