

the vent (anus) to gill collar, taking care not to puncture any internal organs.

Next, cut the gills loose from the backbone at the base of the head, and cut them free from the belly next to the pectoral (lower front) fins. Complete removal of the gills will lengthen its frozen storage life. Detach the lower intestine by cutting around the vent or simply trimming it free.

Holding the fish by its gills, pull the internal organs and other viscera from the body cavity. Lastly, cut the kidney membrane along the backbone and remove the blood by scraping it with a pin.



Freezer Storage:

The most effective method of protecting seafood against both oxidation and desiccation is to prepare it for freezing with a vacuum packaging device and oxygen-barrier film bags.

This procedure normally produces a tight, sealed package without any air in it. Vacuum packing is not in itself a food preservation method but is an excellent way to wrap fish for freezer storage. Vacuum packaging systems designed for home use are currently available \$100 to \$200, not including the cost of bags. While the cost is significant, the system can also be used for packaging other types of food for freezing, such as meats, fruits and vegetables.

Plastic Wrap:

Plastic wrap is probably the most frequently used wrapping material and the second-best choice for freezing, especially if the product is double-wrapped. This wrapping method is especially good for packaging large fish, like salmon and lake trout. The plastic wrap, if properly applied, will adhere tightly to the surface of the fish, forming a moisture barrier that reduces the chances of freezer burn. This type of wrap also blocks oxygen transfer and protects the product against oxidation. After wrapping it in plastic, you should wrap the product again with butcher paper or aluminum foil to protect the fragile plastic film.

Plastic Bags:

Another popular packaging method is to use heavy-duty plastic freezer bags. The twist-tie and zip-lock types are equally effective. The only difficulty in using plastic bags is eliminating air from the packages. To deal with this problem, put the seafood into the bags, seal and freeze it. After a few days, remove the frozen product from the freezer, open the package and add a small amount of cold tap water. Manipulate the water in the bag until you have eliminated the pockets of air, reseal the package and put it back into the freezer. Use as little water as possible. Do not add water to the bag before freezing because seafood will absorb water until it is frozen, which will eventually affect its flavor and texture.

Freezing in Milk Cartons:

Some people freeze fish in washed waxed paper milk cartons. The fish are placed in half-gallon or quart-size cartons, and water is added until the fish are covered, which in effect removes all air around the product. The carton is then sealed and frozen. While this procedure is an effective means of protecting seafood products, it does have some drawbacks. First, as noted above, the seafood product will absorb water during freezing, which will eventually affect its flavor and texture. Second, because of its bulk, such a package will take some time to freeze, and it takes up more space in the freezer. And finally, when it is thawed, it will be necessary to use all the fish in the carton.

Glazing:

Glazing is the process most widely used by commercial processors to protect seafood products against freezer burn during long-term storage. Glazing involves forming a thin coating of ice on the product. After the seafood has been frozen, it is removed from the freezer and dipped in or sprayed with ice-cold water, which then freezes on the surface of the product, forming a thin layer of ice. Glazing is an effective technique

and flavor of the cooked product. To maintain high quality, your fish should be frozen solid within 24 hrs of being placed in the freezer. Generally speaking, you can add two to three pounds of food per cubic foot of freezer space in a 24 hour period. If you have a large quantity of fish, you may want to have a commercial processor freeze it for you.

The length of storage time for fish depends on storage temperature, temperature fluctuations in the freezer, method of packaging and packaging materials, moisture and fat content of the fish and the condition of the fish at the time of freezing. Fish that has remained frozen will be safe to eat for months or longer, but quality inevitably declines with duration.
