

Elizabeth Shephard, Family and Consumer Science Agent

FS# 6174FCS

How to Buy Frozen Seafood

Frozen seafood can be superior in quality to fresh products. Recent technological advances make it possible to clean and flash-freeze fish virtually moments after they are caught. The flash-freezing process can be done in as little as 3 seconds, and it will freeze the water inside fish tissues, thus preserving juices and maximizing flavor and texture when cooked. Due to this quick freezing, quality and freshness are maintained and top quality frozen wholesome fish is now a good option. When properly thawed, frozen fish is comparable to fish that was never frozen, and allows Florida seafood products to be purchased and consumed year round.

What to look for

- Both frozen fish and shellfish should be packaged in a close-fitting moisture and vapor-proof package. Always select packages that are kept in the coldest section of the freezer (not above the load line of the case).
- Packaging should still have the original shape and very little, or no ice.
- Seafood should be frozen solid with no sign of freezer burn, discoloration, or drying on the surface. A sign of freezer burn would be large ice crystals on the food, an indication that the food has been defrosted and refrozen.

Proper handling

As with all seafood, keeping it cold is the number one concern. On the way home from the store do not allow seafood to defrost. If possible, keep seafood in a container to maintain the cold temperature, or bring a cooler packed with ice.

After arriving home it is extremely important to immediately store frozen fish in the refrigerator or freezer. Refrigerators should be kept at 40 degrees Fahrenheit and freezers should be at 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Fish should be stored in the coldest part of the refrigerator in its original packaging. Avoid prolonged storage in the freezer. Commercially frozen seafood can be stored in the freezer for 6 to 12 months, depending on the type of fish and the amount of fat it contains.

Freezing seafood at home

Fish:

1. Start with a high quality product and handle carefully. Read more about buying fresh fish at: <http://brevard.ifas.ufl.edu/fcs/PDF/6173fcs.pdf>
2. Clean fish under cold water and then pat dry.
3. Wrap with plastic wrap, taking out as much air as possible.
4. Overwrap the fish with freezer paper or aluminum foil.
5. Carefully seal all packages and label with the contents, amount of seafood, and date.
6. Place the packages in the coldest part of the freezer where the cold air can circulate around them, freezing them quickly.
7. Be aware that oily fish spoil faster due to the high fat content.

Shrimp: If planning to freeze shrimp at home, be sure it has not been previously frozen. Most shrimp available in the market has been previously frozen, and refreezing shrimp under non-commercial conditions can significantly affect the flavor and texture and may make the shrimp unsafe to eat when thawed.

Shellfish: Shucked shellfish can be frozen in rigid, air tight plastic containers. Make sure the meats are covered with their liquid and there is a ½-inch space between the liquid and the container. Scallop meat can be frozen in plastic freezer bags. Make sure to take out any air in the bag and seal tightly.

Storing Seafood

Here is a quick reference table for storing seafood. The sooner it is consumed the better it is.

PRODUCT		FREEZER STORAGE	REFRIGERATOR STORAGE
FISH FILLETS/ STEAKS (LEAN)	Flounder	6 months	1-2 days
	Grouper		
	Mahi-Mahi		
	Pompano		
	Snapper		
FISH FILLETS/ STEAKS (FATTY)	Tilapia	2 months	
	Mackerel (King and Spanish)		
	Mullet		
	Swordfish		
	Yellowfin Tuna		
SHELLFISH	Shrimp	6 months	1-2 days
	Spiny Lobster		1-2 days
	Stone Crab		1-2 days

References

Abeels, H, Adams, C., Courtney, E. Fluech, B. Krimsky, L., Mahan, W., Otwell, S., Saari, B., Sandoval, C., Shephard,, E., Zamozski, K. Zimmerman, D. Florida Seafood at Your Fingertips Curriculum (2013). University of Florida IFAS Extension.

Hicks, Doris, DE Sea Grant and Clemson University Cooperative Extension, *Safe Handling of Seafood*.