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A survey of practices in freezing foods at home in the U.S.

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Freezing food is an easy and popular method of home food preservation. Improper practices can lead to poor food quality and satisfaction as well as economic losses. Educational efforts and publications for the home food preserver need to be targeted toward the interests and practices of today's consumer.

The objective was to conduct a national survey of households that routinely practice home freezing preservation of foods, to determine the level of activity and types of practices.

A series of 42 close- or open-ended questions were answered by 473 adults in a national telephone interview conducted by the Survey Research Center, University of Georgia from October 24, 2000 to January 10, 2001. Questions included respondent's source of freezing instructions, types and quantities of foods frozen, blanching methods, packaging materials used, food spoilage and demographic information.

A freezer separate from the refrigerator/freezer is maintained by 53% of respondents, most commonly in a basement. Vegetables are frozen by 43%, seafood by 36% and fresh fruits by 31%. Fresh meat, mainly beef, is repackaged and frozen by 76%. Foods other than meats are repackaged and frozen by 49%. One in four report blanching food before freezing. Plastic bags are the most preferred packaging method, followed by plastic containers. Over 90% reported that the foods they froze did not spoil. Food freezing instructions were obtained from family or friends by 29% of respondents and from cookbooks, magazines or newspapers by 15%. A significant number (25%) obtained instructions from 'other' sources that included 'common sense'/general knowledge.

Public awareness of the Extension Service and USDA as a source of home food freezing recommendations could be improved. Significant activity in freezing fresh foods as well as repackaging of purchased foods indicates that consumer information on packaging techniques and other practices for preserving quality is important.