

## Meal Prepping for Real Life

Save Time. Eat Better. Stress Less.

### Prep-as-You-Go Freezer Staples

Instead of bulk prepping everything at once, use this method: every time you buy a fresh item, prep what you won't use right away and freeze the rest.

- Carrots – Peel and slice or dice; freeze flat in bags. Great for soups or roasts.
- Celery – Wash, chop, and freeze in bags. Add directly to recipes.
- Onions – Chop in bulk using a food processor and freeze in ½ cup portions.
- Caramelize onions in butter and place in freezer bag flat on cookie sheet to freeze, after they cool
- Fresh Spinach – Rinse, dry, and freeze in handfuls for smoothies or sautés.
- Bell Peppers – Dice and freeze for omelets, stir-fries, and casseroles.
- Zucchini or Summer Squash – Grate and freeze flat for muffins or soups.

Tip: Lay bags flat in the freezer for faster freezing and easier stacking. I use a chop stick to make section lines for easy portion break offs, like a grade design

### Fridge & Freezer Smart Staples

- Block Cheese – Grate and store in glass jars. Avoid anti-caking agents in pre-shredded cheese. Use a food processor or Kitchen Aid grater to do the heavy grating work
- Cream – Pour into freezer-safe bags (mark portions). Defrost overnight in fridge. I buy fresh from the dairy.
- Romaine Lettuce – Wash, dry in spinner, chop, and jar. Stays crisp 2–3 weeks.
- Homemade Salad Dressings – Mix oil/vinegar or creamy base dressings, store in jars. Freeze extras in small bags for thaw-and-use convenience.

### Protein Planning that Pays Off

- Buy Beef in Bulk – Share a quarter, half, or whole cow with others. Get cuts you actually want, skip mystery meat.
- Avoid Wrapped Meats at the Store – Pre-cut, pre-packaged meats often have added solutions and bacteria risk. If fresh isn't available, buy vacuum-sealed frozen cuts.
- Cook Once, Eat Twice – Make a batch of ground beef, shredded chicken, or meatballs, freeze in meal-size portions. I cook a lot of meat at one time in a crock pot. I do not buy meat without bones so after it's cooked all day the meat falls off the bones. Chicken with bones and skin make the best broth.

## More Time-Saving Staples to Freeze

- Cooked Rice or Quinoa – Freeze in 1-cup portions. Add straight to stir-fries or soups. Did you know that rice left in the fridge for more than a day grows bacteria? The same for pasta.
- Homemade Broth or Soup Bases – Freeze in large silicone muffin mods. The broth pops right out after freezing and stores well in a gallon freezer bag. This is a great way to store the broth you get from cooking your meat ahead of time.
- Herbs in Oil – Chop herbs like basil, parsley, or rosemary and freeze with olive oil in silicone ice cube trays. Don't forget to label them because they all look alike.
- Chop and store garlic in the freezer in oil. Do not buy peeled garlic in the produce section as the garlic is prone to harboring bacteria growth.
- Mashed Potatoes – Freeze leftover mashed potatoes in scoops for fast sides.
- Tomato Paste – Using a medium cookie dough scoop, drop them into small silicone molds to pop out after frozen and store in a freezer bag for easy access later.
- Egg Muffins or Frittatas – Pre-bake in muffin tins, freeze, reheat individually. I've made prefaced egg muffins and find they are sometimes rubbery so I don't tend to do this much. If you have a good recipe for avoiding the rubbery eggs, please share.

## Charlie's Add-Ons for Long-Term Wins

- Label + Date Everything – Use freezer-safe labels, masking tape or just write on the labels of the freezer bag with a Sharpie.
- Make "Use This First" plastic storage cubes to organize your bounty– Put older freezer items in a designated spot to reduce waste.
- Keep a Freezer Inventory List – Magnet board, dry-erase, or digital note—know what's in there without digging. I use my reminders app on my iPhone and keep a running list of thing I have. When I run out I have a section for groceries with the stores I shop in and I add it to the lists I've created.