

125 FREEZER-FRIENDLY RECIPES

the
MAKE AHEAD VEGAN
• COOKBOOK •



GINNY KAY McMEANS

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mother, Vivian Kay, who was my life's inspiration.



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INTRODUCTION

Comfort foods bring up thoughts of happy memories and have a place in all the cultures of the world. Often they are classics with just a small tweak for a regional twist, or they may be any staple that just makes you feel good. Dive into this cookbook for a variety of recipes that will have you conjuring up nostalgic happiness.

The Make Ahead Vegan Cookbook came about because of my desire to share all of the recipes that I have created and adapted over my years of cooking. Freezing delicious and healthy meals ranks high so that time is never an excuse for not eating well. There is a sensible and creative side to me that makes me want to serve vegan recipes that everyone loves. Yes, *everyone*, not just vegans. Nothing is more satisfying to me than to have people marveling over a Moist and Extravagant Carrot Bundt Cake or a very easy Slow Cooker Mushrooms and Rice recipe where the word *vegan* is never spoken. The recipes are just that good.

Cooking has always been one of my passions. I used to joke that I have made 3,000 different recipes—nowadays I think I actually have. It felt like a different meal every night and I loved it! When I first became vegan, I bought some cookbooks and did not realize that I had obtained some down-and-dirty, no-nonsense, hardcore vegan cookbooks that took no prisoners. There were lots of recipes that I wanted to re-create, but I literally had no idea what some of the ingredients were. With some Googling, I learned a lot of things and one of them is that I had to go to specialized grocery stores to source the products. Right away it was fun finding new foods to cook with and also learning how important it is to make sure I was getting all the vitamins and nutrition that I needed.

More knowledge was gained as I continued experimenting. And one of the big lessons I learned is that you really do *not* need many hard-to-find or specialty ingredients (or, at least, not very often). Grocery stores have come a long way since my first vegan days and I can find almost everything I need right here in my own small town. Chia seeds and coconut oil are sitting right there on the shelf. There are still some things that I need from specialty stores, such as full-fat coconut milk to make vegan ice cream, or nutritional yeast because it is such a great addition to so many recipes. Most of the basics for my recipes are fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains obtained at the regular grocery store and local farmers' market. There seems to be organic everything, everywhere. You will also be amazed how many vegan products are already at your grocer's. A few of my recipes contain all-around, well-loved packaged items that are popular with everyone, everywhere.

For the purist at heart, I often offer alternatives in the recipe for people who don't want to use the store-bought brands. Instead of empanada disks, you can make your own homemade vegan dough. Take your choice. It is all vegan and freezer-friendly. A growing trend that I am seeing is that many people would like to

make their own food from scratch, so that what they eat is as clean and natural as possible. My Italian Cannellini Soup is made with fresh ingredients and is to die for. No preservatives or additives, not ever. And did I also say: it's freezable!

An important factor that I think a lot of people miss is freezing their food. Everything I have mentioned can be frozen. It isn't hard. Freezing food is just something that needs to be pointed out and brought to the front of people's minds. When you freeze food, nothing is wasted. Freezing food is a daily routine in my life. Either things are going in or things are coming out. This cookbook will explain how you can easily make dishes, sides, and snacks that are delicious and also easy to freeze. Quality and nutrition will be preserved and you will have wonderful food at your fingertips. Freezing recipes is not labor intensive as some might think and my recipes are tried and true. I want people to understand this and also reap the benefits.

If you want to save time in the kitchen, you can turn that one meal into two by just doubling your ingredients and packaging some for the freezer. That is such a satisfying feeling! Breakfast, lunch, or dinner—there can always be something in the freezer that will defrost in no time or that you can zap in the microwave. You don't need a large freezer or an extra full-size freezer in the garage to cook this way—although that would be fun.

I have one of those white refrigerators with the freezer on top—you know the kind—and it is not even full. Sometimes it fills up, but when it gets there I am reminded to kick back and eat some of those delicious and nutritious meals inside, such as the Panini Chili Bean Cakes, American Tetrazzini, or those Five-Spice Comfort Pita Sandwiches. "Wow!" I think to myself, "I just got a few days off."

Here is something else that I tackled when I became a vegan: How could I turn my most beloved recipes into their vegan cousins, and still keep intact the flavors I loved? My experimenting began by exchanging a nonvegan ingredient for a vegan one, and new recipes were born. I discovered you can make a deep, rich French onion soup with no beef stock.

And, did you know that most raw fruit balls or date balls and cookie dough treats can all be frozen? They can even be eaten right out of the freezer. That was a pleasant discovery!

Exciting flavors are abundant throughout this book. It has been my goal to create the most flavorful recipes possible that can be enjoyed not only by the vegan community but also by nonvegans everywhere. People from every part of the country have been in touch with me to say they love my recipes, and I love to get these compliments because it assures me that my goal is being accomplished.

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF FREEZING

To Freeze or Not to Freeze

It is a major factor to decide what to freeze or not to freeze. Luckily, almost everything can be frozen. This is going to be a very short discussion. A blanket category of things that don't freeze well is dairy items. That won't be a problem with my recipes because I do not use any dairy.

ITEMS NOT TO FREEZE

- *Potatoes often become mealy.* An exception is mashed potatoes; they freeze beautifully. When I do soups or stews, I parboil the potatoes right before dinner and put them in the defrosted recipe when heating for the meal.
- *Raw produce with a high water content,* such as cabbage, celery, cucumber, eggplant, endive, fennel, leafy greens, lettuce, parsley, peppers, radishes, ripe tomatoes, summer squash, turnips, watermelons, and zucchini, become soggy if frozen.
- *Many herbs and spices* change their flavor when frozen. I will tell you which herb or spice to add later in each of my recipes.

Containers for Freezing Food

There's a wide variety of containers for freezing food, from plastic to glass from flimsy to rigid. I use all of them and here is a description of each type and my favorites.

- * Glass containers with airtight lids
- * Glass containers with lids that are not airtight
- * Glass canning jars that are made for freezing (read the packaging). The only ones I have found are wide-mouth jars. None have been over the size of a pint, either.
- * Plastic, lidded, rigid-sided containers that are not airtight
- * Freezer bags from the grocery store, in different sizes
- * Aluminum foil. This works in some situations.

The glass containers with airtight lids are very easy. All you do is put your food inside and snap on the lids. They do take up a bit more space in the freezer, but they stack so neatly and I can move them much easier when looking for food.

Glass containers with lids that are not specifically made for the freezer are great for ease also, but they are not airtight, so you will need to slide the whole container into a freezer bag. I point out a handy technique in "Preparing Food for

the Freezer” that will enable you to remove your empty casserole dish after the food is frozen.

Glass canning jars are also easy. You just need to remember to leave about an inch of space between the food and the lid because liquids expand when frozen. Do not use cleaned-out jars that used to hold spaghetti sauce or other items, because they were not made for freezing and may break or not hold a good seal.



The heavier, lidded, plastic-sided containers that you buy new in the store will need to be slipped into a freezer bag.

Freezer bags will hold baked goods, other containers that are not airtight, liquids, and just about anything. They have zippered tops and can be used over and over. I do not try to save bags that held anything liquid, though. If the freezer bags are just holding closed containers, they are very simple to save. I save an older, empty freezer bag box, and after the freezer bags have dried out, I roll them, one at a time, and slide them back into the box. Nice and neat.

When freezing food in a freezer bag without a container, try to push out as much air as possible before sealing.

Aluminum foil can be used for wrapping around solids after they have already been prewrapped in plastic wrap. Otherwise, the foil could cause a reaction with some foods that it touches during storage.

Preparing Food for the Freezer

There are multiple ways in preparing food for the freezer. I quickly mentioned a few in the section “Containers for Freezing Food.”

The easiest procedure and the one I use the most is to put food in freezer-safe glass containers that have four tabs all around on their plastic lids. These snap and give an airtight seal. My containers have been used numerous times and I see no end to their life.

Glass canning jars are equally easy. You just need to remember to leave about an inch of space between the liquid and the lid. Liquid expands and will have a higher level after it has frozen. I have only seen wide-mouth jars marked as freezer jars, and never in the quart size.

Many firm items—such as bean patties, berries, and certain sweets like truffles—can be frozen without a covering and then, within one to 10 hours, put into freezer bags. You lay them out, without touching, on a cookie sheet and then slide the sheet into the freezer. Allow the food to freeze until solid. This allows items to freeze without sticking together. You might have to use a spatula to pop them off the cookie sheet, but they come off very easily. Then, pop them into a freezer bag and they are done.

Sometimes I like to wrap my items individually with plastic wrap. This works well with such things as bean patties. When I am finished, I place the group of wrapped items in a freezer bag or rigid-sided plastic container with a lid. Just another option for when I am running low on my glass containers.

Casseroles come next. They can also be frozen in the glass containers with airtight lids—as is. When I am running low on containers, I will go to the little extra work to freeze in plastic wrap and freezer foil. First, I line the container with foil so that all corners are covered. Then I do the same thing with plastic wrap laid on top

of the foil. I put my casserole into the prepared dish just as I would normally. The casserole is touching the plastic wrap, not the foil. Fold all the sides in, the plastic wrap first and then the foil. Label the foil clearly and slide into the freezer, in the glass container. After the casserole is solid, remove it from the glass dish and put the wrapped casserole back into the freezer. When you want to use this casserole, remove all the wrapping (both the foil and the plastic). Then slide the casserole back into the original casserole dish to defrost. Bake when defrosted as directed.

Another way that I have adopted for casseroles is to make two long handles with aluminum foil. The way you do this is to take a long strip of foil that is about twice as long as your casserole dish. Fold it over many times so it is one long, many-layered strip. Lay this in your casserole dish down the middle. Make your casserole as you normally would. Put this in the freezer to harden. When the food is solid, take the dish out of the freezer. Use the “handles” made of foil to carefully remove the food from the dish. Now pack this in a freezer bag (sliding out the foil handle) seal, and replace in the freezer. Now you have your casserole dish back.

Lastly, don't forget to label the items. It makes life so much easier. I use freezer tape and sometimes I write on the freezer bag with a permanent marker.

As you can see, you can find an option for every situation in preparing food for the freezer. It is so rewarding to open your freezer and have food for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks just waiting for you.



Blanching Vegetables—Preparing Veggies Correctly for Freezing

Blanching vegetables is an easy step, but a necessary one, when you are planning to freeze fresh vegetables.

- Get a pot that is large enough to hold your vegetables and water to cover. While the water is coming to a boil, clean and prepare your vegetables.
- When the water is at a boil, plunge in your vegetables.
- Cover and set your timer (see blanching times) as soon as the water starts to boil again.
- Set up a big bowl of ice water for cooling down the vegetables.

- Drain the vegetables and immediately put into the bowl of ice water. Leave for a few minutes.
- Remove the vegetables from the cool water, lay out, and pat dry.
- Pack into your container of choice. All done.

This blanching method kills the enzymes to keep the veggies from spoiling. It also sets the color for freezing.

BLANCHING TIMES

Following is a list of blanching times (in minutes) for specific vegetables.

Asparagus	3
Bean sprouts	4
Black-eyed peas	2
Broccoli spears	4
Brussels sprouts	3
Carrots (½-inch slices)	3
Carrots, whole baby	5
Cauliflower (florets)	2
Corn	3
Corn on the cob	7
Green beans	2
Green peas	2
Lima beans	1
Mushrooms	4
Okra	4
Onions	4

Spinach	2
Summer squash (sliced)	2
Winter squash (cubed)	5



Stocking the Freezer

Freezers are colder in some spots than in others. There are certain ways to pack a freezer to be more energy efficient. Stocking the freezer with store-bought items and homemade goods will give you a wide array of choices.

Your freezer temperature should be 0°F or lower.



