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How to Freeze Lima Beans, Broad beans, Butter Beans and/or Pinto Beans

If you like frozen lima beans (called Broad Beans in the UK) or Butter beans, or pinto beans in the winter, just imagine how good they would taste if you had picked a bag yourself and then quickly froze them at home! It is also one of the simplest ways to put up a vegetable for the winter. Here's how to do it, complete instructions in easy steps and completely illustrated. The lima beans will taste **MUCH** better than anything you've ever had from a store. The directions are the same for lima, broad beans, butter beans and pintos, so I'll just refer to limas below.

Directions for Freezing Lima Beans

Ingredients and Equipment

- fresh lima, butter, pinto or broad beans - any quantity. I figure one handful per serving.
- Vacuum food sealer or "ziploc" type freezer bags (the freezer bag version is heavier and protects better against freezer burn.
- 1 Large pot of boiling water
- 2 large bowls, one filled with cold water and ice.
- 1 sharp knife

Instructions

(Note; new photos are coming - my camera was damaged when I did this recipe, so I had to borrow photos from the green beans page to illustrate the steps)

Step 1 - Get yer lima beans!

Start with fresh lima beans - as fresh as you can get. If there is a delay between harvesting and freezing, put it in the refrigerator or put ice on it. And don't use beans that are old, overripe or dried out : Harvest while the seed is in the green stage. Wash, shell and sort according to size (small, medium and large).



Step 2 - Wash the lima beans!

I'm sure you can figure out how to rinse the beans in plain cold or lukewarm water.



lima

Step 3 - Shell the beans

Everyone has their own technique to shell beans. I just pop them open with my thumb and use my thumb to slide them out.

Step 4 - Get the pots ready

Get the pot of boiling water ready (about 2/3 filled) and a LARGE bowl with ice and cold water.



Step 5 - Blanch the lima beans.

All fruits and vegetables contain **enzymes and bacteria** that, over time, break down the destroy nutrients and change the color, flavor, and texture of food during frozen storage. lima beans requires a brief heat treatment, called **blanching, in boiling water or steam**, to destroy the enzymes before freezing. Blanching times for lima beans is:



- small beans 2 minutes,
- medium beans 3 minutes and
- large beans 4 minutes.

This will be just long enough to stop the action of the enzymes and kill the bacteria.

Begin counting the blanching time as soon as you place the lima beans in the boiling water. Cover the kettle and boil at a high temperature for the required length of time. You may use the same blanching water several times (up to 5). Be sure to add

more hot water from the tap from time to time to keep the water level at the required height.

Step 6 - Cool the lima beans

Cool lima beans immediately in ice water. Drain the lima beans thoroughly (this shouldn't take more than a minute).

After vegetables are blanched, cool them quickly to prevent overcooking. Plunge the lima beans into a large quantity of ice-cold water (I keep adding more ice to it). A good rule of thumb: Cool for the same amount of time as the blanch step. For instance, if you blanch sweet lima beans for 3 minutes, then cool in ice water for 3 minutes.



Drain thoroughly.

Step 7 - bag the lima beans

I love the FoodSavers ([see this page for more information](#)) with their vacuum sealing! I am not paid by them, but these things really work. If you don't have one, Ziploc bags work, too, but it is hard to get as much air out of the bags. Remove the air to prevent drying and freezer burn. **TIP:** If you don't own a vacuum food sealer to freeze foods, place food in a Ziploc bags, zip the top shut but leave enough space to insert the tip of a soda straw. When straw is in place, remove air by sucking the air out. To remove straw, press straw closed where inserted and finish pressing the



bag closed as you remove straw. It works fairly well, but I'll stick to the Foodsaver, since the bags are microwaveable and much thicker than a Ziploc bag (even the Ziploc "freezer bags")

Step 8 - Done!

Pop them into the freezer, on the quick freeze shelf, if you have one!



Tips:

- Harvest early in the morning, especially if the weather is hot, to get peak flavor.
- Harvest the lima beans at its peak maturity (firm, straight, not lumpy)
- Process promptly after harvesting, or keep cooled in the fridge or with ice until then.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **When you take your lima beans out of the freezer, how long do they take to cook?**

Just the same as store-bought frozen lima beans: 3 to 5 minutes; just until hot and tender.

2. I've frozen lima beans but they seem so rubbery after being cooked. Any idea why?

Generally, that means the beans were either old to begin with, or they were overcooked. It only takes 3 minutes to blanch the beans, then plunge them immediately into ice water.

3. How long can they be frozen?

It depends upon how cold is your freezer and how you packed them. Colder (deep freezes) are better than frost free compartments, which actually cycle above freezing (that's how they melt the ice). Vacuum packing results in longer storage capability, too. Thicker bags also help prevent freezer burn.

In general, up to 9 months in a ziploc bag in an ordinary freezer, and 14 months in a deep freeze in a vacuum packed bag. After that, the beans won't make you sick; they just won't taste as good.

4. When blanching lima beans you say to cook for 3 minutes only. When we put the beans into the boiling water the boiling stops for several minutes before starting again. This may add 5 or 10 minutes to the process. Is this good or should we take the beans out after 3 minutes even if the water hasn't come back to a boil?

Excellent question. The directions from the USDA assume that we're using a

http://www.pickyourown.org/freezing_lima_beans.htm

large enough pot and a large enough burner that it returns to a boil quickly (say 2 or 3 minutes). If you can, use a larger pot on a hotter burner. If that's not practical, I just add a couple of minutes to the time - otherwise the food gets overcooked!