

## Food Storage & Leftovers

*Supports: Building Block 7 — Food: Satisfaction, Seasoning & Preparation*

### Why It Matters

Cooking and shopping well only pay off if the food lasts. A little know-how about where things go and how long they keep means fresh produce doesn't wilt in the back of the fridge, leftovers become tomorrow's easy lunch, and less of your grocery money ends up in the trash. Storing food well is one of the simplest, least glamorous habits that quietly supports everything else — it keeps whole foods on hand and makes the healthy choice the easy one. And because whole foods spoil faster than packaged ones, storing them well matters more, not less, as you eat this way.

### What to Know

#### Keep it fresh — the basics

- Keep the fridge at about 40°F or below and the freezer at 0°F. Most produce lasts longest in the crisper drawers.
- Store most produce dry and wash it right before eating. If you wash and cut ahead for grab-and-go, dry it well and add a paper towel to the container to catch moisture.
- A few things do better on the counter than in the fridge: **tomatoes, bananas, potatoes, onions, garlic, and whole melon** — chilling them dulls the flavor or texture.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, and fish on the bottom shelf so their juices can't drip onto other foods.
- First in, first out: keep older items in front so they get used before they turn.

#### What freezes well (and what doesn't)

- **Freezes beautifully:** cooked beans and grains, soups, stews, chili, sauces, shredded cooked chicken, bread, and most fruit. Freeze berries or banana slices on a tray first, then bag them for smoothies. Portion into meal-size containers and label with the date.
- **Freezes poorly:** crisp salad greens and cucumbers (they go limp), plain cooked potatoes (they turn grainy), and creamy dairy sauces (they can separate).
- Cool food before it goes in, leave a little headspace in liquids, and use frozen meals within a few months for the best flavor.

## Leftover safety — a few simple rules

- Refrigerate leftovers within about two hours of cooking.
- Most cooked leftovers keep 3–4 days in the fridge. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Reheat until hot all the way through, giving it a stir so it heats evenly.
- Store in shallow containers so food cools quickly and evenly.

**Ease into it — progress, not perfection.** You don't need a label-maker or matching containers. Start with one habit — washing and drying your produce right after shopping, or freezing the half you won't finish this week. Small storage wins add up to less waste and more grab-and-go.

## Cook once, eat twice

Make a little extra on purpose. A double batch of soup, chili, or grains turns one cooking session into several easy meals — one for now, one for the fridge, one for the freezer. Many NuStart recipes note how long they keep and whether they freeze; let those be your guide.

## Try This

Pick one thing to store better this week — freeze a meal-size portion of your next batch of soup or grains, or give your produce the right home so it lasts. For recipes that keep and freeze well, see the recipe collection and A Year in the Kitchen.

- ? *What food do you most often end up throwing away — and where could it be stored better?*
- ? *Which meal could you make a double batch of, to stock your fridge or freezer?*
- ? *What's one thing on your counter that would last longer — or one in your fridge that would taste better — somewhere else?*