

## Making Better Chop

Category: Companion Parrot Feeding

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I was asked by a couple of people to write an article about the reality of chop. Not recipes or opinions, but the real food science practices of food preservation and preparation as it pertains to Fruits and Veggies. So let's talk about the best practices of preservation and freezing of chop ingredients. I hope you'll find some of these thoughts helpful in your chop life, and I really hope your flock's nutrition also benefits from applying these ideas to your chopping practices.

Let's cut to the lettuces first as well as the Kales and trending greens for chop. You can not 100% successfully freeze fresh lettuces, kales, and "juicy" fruits. Thawing chopped high water content fresh lettuces, kales and fruits will result in mush and break down of the foods themselves. Leave the chop out thawing long enough and you'll immediately experience break down and growth of bacteria. These foods are rotting as soon as the freeze is gone. Freezing fresh herbs yields the same problem. It's the freeze/thaw event that literally explodes the fibers resulting in broken down plant flesh. The freezing increases the volume of the water content, the thawing results in torn and crushed fibers soaking in the thawed moisture, which invites bacteria. Enzyme activation, cell wall rupturing and literally knowing how much you can expect of your freezer to perform properly all plays heavily in what you will find at the time of thawing.

Over packing a freezer is one of the biggest mistakes made in food preservation. Who knew right? There are literally instructions in your Refrigerator Manual about how much you can freeze at any one time with your Fridge. Who knew? GENERALLY you can freeze 3 pounds of material (fruit/veggie, not necessarily meat. That's another conversation.) per 1 cubic foot per 24 hour period before adding more. You want your freezing step to go as quickly as possible. Overloading your freezer will slow down the process and all the while your chop is degrading. Freeze time management is one of the top 3 important processes to stay on top of during your freeze. The University of Minnesota has a great page on Food Safety on their extension page.

So, what CAN be done with our high water contents to alleviate the problem? I received a link from a friend of a chop enthusiast who is now "sun drying" his lettuces et al" before chopping and freezing. That's a great step! BUT, here's the caveat. Successful, healthy and bacteria free drying processes require some planning and steps a bit more complicated than laying a plate in the sun. AND where you live, and the humidity and winds plays a massive part.

Firstly, drying veggies in the sun isn't recommended. Veggies are low in sugars and acids which opens the door to spoilage. Fruits are high in sugars and acids and can be successfully dried. You will need hot (86degrees), dry and breezy days. All other variables will cause problems. Sun drying in the general sense can be done, but with dehydrators available for purchase that are 100% controllable I HIGHLY, HIGHLY recommend using this appliance instead. Our parrots are sensitive to bacteria, spores and mold and a properly used dehydrator eliminates the concern. The University of Georgia COOP has an EXCELLENT extension has a great article on preserving fruits and veggies.

So chop has left the simplicity of spending a few hundred dollars on exotic and local fresh market pantries, one wood block and knife and few hundred zip lock baggies at this point. The most avid parrot lovers are chop enthusiasts. I can't argue their passion. But I will say that without applying food safety and food sciences to the chopping board, the efforts are not yielding what we think, at all.

So let's cut to the chase with some Chop Tricks!

Lettuces, Kale, BokChoy and herbs: Remove all the stem viens and stalks. Literally tear the soft lettuce off it's stem, the stem/viens carry a bulk of the water. Use a dehydrator not the sun.

Fruits: Thin slice the fruits for fast results. You want them exposed as shortly as possible outside, and by thin slicing consistently for a dehydrator your results will improve dramatically.

Your ultimate goal for chop is to have the LEAST amount of plant moisture in the final stage as possible.

Remember 3 pounds of chop per cubic foot per 24 hour freeze cycle. Give your freezing cycle the shortest route, and your freezer a fighting chance to get it right for you. Decreasing the temperature of your freezer does NOT affect the math on this. You can't cheat your way into a bigger freeze. Although I know there's a movie out there that says New York could freeze over in like, 6 hours, if the storm was cold enough. But Hollywood is silly sometimes.

***Together we can give every parrot everywhere, a happy home!***

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