

# HANDLING & STORAGE

## Seafood Handling and Storage

Seafood is more perishable than many food items, and the consumer must pay a little more attention to its careful handling. Keep it cold, keep it clean, store it quickly, and prepare and cook it quickly.

When storing fresh seafood, keep it in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Fish will lose quality and deteriorate rapidly with higher storage temperature— so use ice when you can.

### Store Seafood Properly

Finfish should be stored in the refrigerator and used within 1 to 2 days after purchase. It's a good idea to store it on ice in the refrigerator to keep it as cold as possible. If the fish won't be used within 2 days, wrap it tightly in moisture-proof bags (so the fish won't dry out) and store it in the freezer.

Shellfish, such as mussels, clams and oysters that are purchased live in their shells, should be put in a shallow pan (no water), covered with moistened paper towels and refrigerated. Mussels and clams should be used within 2-3 days and oysters within 7-10 days. Shucked shellfish can be placed in a sealed container and frozen. Live lobsters and crabs should be cooked the day they are purchased.

Frozen seafood should be kept frozen, and it is a good idea to date packages of frozen seafood so you can use the older seafood first. It's best to thaw frozen seafood in the refrigerator overnight. Other thawing methods include: immersing frozen seafood in cold water for a short time in a sealed plastic bag, or microwaving on a defrost setting until the fish is pliable but still icy. Be careful not to overheat the seafood in the microwave or you will start the cooking process.

### Handle and Prepare Seafood Properly

All foods, including seafood, must be handled and prepared in a clean area to avoid cross-contamination. Always remember to keep your hands, preparation area and utensils clean. Never let raw seafood come in contact with already cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Whether you are storing fresh fish or thawing frozen fish in your refrigerator, make sure that the juices from raw seafood do not drip onto food that has already been cooked or food that will not be cooked.

Marinades are great for seafood but should not be saved and used as a sauce unless the marinade has been cooked to a temperature of at least 165°F to eliminate microorganisms from the raw fish. Always marinate in the refrigerator in a glass or plastic container.

Never serve cooked seafood on a plate that held the raw product without proper cleaning. Store leftovers, properly wrapped, in the refrigerator within 2 hours. Bacteria will grow rapidly in the temperature "Danger Zone" of 40-140°F so keep hot food above 140°F and cold food below 40°F.

### Cook Seafood Properly

To avoid foodborne illness, it is necessary to cook seafood to an internal temperature of 145°F for 15 seconds until the flesh is opaque and flaky. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temp in the thickest part to make sure that it is fully cooked without overcooking. When fully cooked, scallops and shrimp will turn firm and opaque. Shellfish like clams, mussels, oysters will become plump & opaque and their shells will open. Lobster and crab shells will turn bright red with a pearly-opaque flesh.



**7839 Enterprise Dr. Mentor, Ohio 440-951-6448 Toll Free 800-686-0908**  
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## Thawing

Seafood is extremely perishable. Quickly freezing it at the height of freshness is a successful way to keep the flavor and texture. When purchasing frozen seafood, look for solidly frozen pieces with few ice crystals to ensure they have not thawed and re-frozen at some point before purchase. Keep the seafood frozen until you are ready to use it by storing it in the coldest section of your freezer, on a low shelf towards the back.

When you are ready to use the frozen product, you may safely defrost it in one of the following three ways: in the refrigerator, under cool running water, or in the microwave.

### Refrigerator Thawing

Plan at least a day ahead if you choose to defrost in the refrigerator. It will take about 24 hours to defrost a frozen item. Place frozen seafood in a clean container to catch the liquid released from the product as it thaws. If the frozen seafood is not already wrapped in plastic, cover the top lightly with plastic wrap to protect it from coming in to contact with other foods in the refrigerator. Place the container on a low shelf and defrost slowly over a day. After thawing, remove any liquid that has collected in the packaging and use within a day for optimal freshness and safety.

### Cool Water Thawing

Use this method when you have less time, but are able to more closely watch the frozen seafood. Begin by placing the food in a leak-proof plastic bag. Submerge the seafood in cold tap water and change the water every thirty minutes until the food has defrosted. Do not try to speed the process by defrosting in hot water because this will encourage bacteria on the food to multiply. Cook seafood thawed under cold water immediately after thawing.

### Microwave Thawing

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for choosing the appropriate microwave defrost setting and defrost until the food is cool and pliable. Be careful not to overheat-this will start the cooking process. Cook seafood that has been microwave-defrosted immediately after thawing.

## Marinating

Many fish and shellfish benefit from a quick soak in a marinade to boost flavor and help retain moisture. Even so, use care when choosing marinade ingredients and limit the seafood's time in the marinade so as not to overwhelm its natural flavor. Usually half an hour is enough time to add flavor to a delicate piece of seafood: less time is needed if you are using a strong acid in the marinade, such as lemon juice, which chemically "cooks" the food and alters its texture.

Experiment with different marinade ingredients, and gradually increase the amounts added or the time the seafood is kept in the marinade till you achieve a flavor balance you like. Most marinades consist of varying proportions of oil, an acid (white wine, fruit juice, or vinegar) and spices or herbs.

For Asian-inspired marinades, choose soy sauce, scallions or sesame oil as the primary flavoring agents. Marinades with a Southwestern flair might include the flavors of cilantro and lime. Try flavoring marinades with fresh basil and parsley for an Italian twist. No matter which combinations you choose, season lightly with salt-you may find that you prefer less because the seafood is already deeply flavored (and you can always add more salt once the seafood is cooked).

For easy cleanup, marinate seafood in a food-grade plastic baggie with a re-sealable top. Always marinate under refrigeration and throw out used marinade to help prevent food borne illness. Remove excess marinade from seafood before cooking to help prevent flare-ups when grilling or broiling.



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