

Easy Ground Beef Recipes from Your Freezer

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Make-Ahead Crumbled Beef

1 batch makes enough for 4 to 6 servings

Think of how often you could use already-browned and ready-to-go ground beef “crumbles” in recipes such as soups and sauces. Ground beef may be browned ahead of time and frozen for quick and convenient use in spaghetti sauce, chili, sloppy joes, etc. Here's how to make your own and keep them frozen for ready access!



Basic Directions

Use 90% lean and higher ground beef for these directions; 16 ounces raw ground beef yields equally to 12 ounces fully cooked ground beef crumbles.

1. In general, brown no more than 1 pound of ground beef at a time. As ground beef browns, some meat juices are released. If you overload the skillet, moisture is trapped and meat is steamed rather than browned.
2. Brown lean ground beef in large nonstick skillet over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is not pink, breaking beef up into 3/4-inch crumbles. Remove beef with slotted spoon.
3. Add one or more of the antioxidant foods and spices listed in number 2 under “Tips for Success” below to the beef as it is browning to aid in flavor retention during freezing. **Note:** You may find it most versatile and time-saving to add one chopped medium onion to the beef as it is browning. So many recipes call for both beef and onions.

Tips for Success

Follow these tips for best flavor and quality:

1. When making beef crumbles for later use, if possible, avoid using iron or aluminum cooking utensils as these speed flavor changes.
2. Brown crumbles with onions or unroasted bell peppers which have antioxidant properties and slow flavor changes. OR, brown the meat, seasoned lightly, with one or more of these herbs and spices that have antioxidant properties: rosemary, sage, marjoram, thyme, mace, allspice and cloves. Use the seasoning and amount that will be most suitable for the recipes you make. Add more seasoning when you prepare the food, if needed, as freezing may affect the intensity of the flavor of spices and herbs.
3. Do not use salt; add salt later when the meat is used in your recipe. Salt may hasten undesirable flavor changes in beef crumbles. Freezing the crumbles as part of a sauce, such as spaghetti sauce, also helps preserve flavor. Make sure the sauce covers the entire meat surface.

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Know how. Know now.

4. Cool and refrigerate beef crumbles promptly in shallow containers. Containers may be placed in the refrigerator before beef has cooled entirely. Loosely cover refrigerated container until beef has cooled.
5. Promptly transfer the cooled beef crumbles to plastic "freezer," NOT "storage" bags. Eliminate air pockets. Freezer bags are thicker than storage bags and will keep the food fresh longer. Label and date packages; include amount of beef or number of servings.
6. Speed freezing and hasten thawing by freezing crumbles in a thinner, flattened shape in freezer bags. Do not stack packages – the quality will be better if the beef freezes faster. A rounded shape takes longer to thaw through to the middle. Flattened packages also will stack better in your freezer. Place on a flat surface, such as a metal pan or cookie sheet until frozen. Then, remove and stack.
7. Use frozen beef crumbles within 2 to 3 months for best flavor and quality. Freeze at 0 degrees F or lower.
8. **IMPORTANT:** Unless you plan to use beef crumbles within a day or two, freeze crumbles promptly after cooling for best quality and safety. If stored in the refrigerator for a day or two, transfer to a tightly covered container after they have cooled.

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YOUR NOTES:

Recipes Using Make-Ahead Crumbled Beef

Most of these recipes can be prepared either immediately after preparing the ground beef crumbles **made with chopped onion** and then frozen; OR, you can prepare them by using the frozen crumbles directly from the freezer and then eat them right away. It depends on how much versatility you want. Would you rather make the recipe you want when you want it with crumbles straight from the freezer OR would you like some recipes already prepared and waiting for you in the freezer? Or, you might just decide to make these recipes and eat them right away without freezing!

MICROWAVE TIP:

Many of these foods can be heated in the microwave. Be careful when removing a lid or plastic wrap from a hot microwaved item. Hot steam escaping from the container as the covering is lifted could cause a burn.

If covering the microwave container with a microwave-safe plastic wrap, follow manufacturers' directions for venting the wrap. Directions usually recommend venting the wrap at a corner or side of the dish and leaving at least an inch of air space between the food and the wrap covering the dish.

NOTE: Foods high in fat or sugar should not come into contact with plastic wrap as they may cause the wrap to melt.

Coney Island Taters (Makes 4 servings)

Make quick work of this main dish by using one batch of frozen crumbled meat mixture, made with chopped onion, instead of preparing the ground beef and onion from scratch. You may need to heat **frozen** crumbles longer than the time cited in the recipe; heat until steamy hot throughout.

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 cup prepared barbecue sauce
- 2 large all-purpose potatoes
- 1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions (optional)

1. In large skillet, brown ground beef and onion over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is no longer pink, breaking up into 3/4-inch crumbles. Pour off drippings. Stir barbecue sauce into beef; cover and simmer over medium-low heat 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile pierce potatoes in several places with fork. Place on paper towel in microwave oven. Microwave on HIGH 10 to 11 minutes or until tender, rearranging potatoes halfway. **TIP:** Some potatoes may become tender before this – start checking a few minutes before time is up.
3. Cut potatoes lengthwise into quarters. Cut each quarter crosswise in half. Arrange 4 pieces potato on each serving plate; top with beef mixture. Sprinkle with cheese; top with green onions, if desired.



Source: Recipe courtesy of National Cattlemen's Beef Association at <http://www.beefitswhatfordinner.com>

YOUR NOTES:

Sloppy Joes (Makes 4 to 6 servings)

Prepare this recipe for eating right away, using one batch of frozen crumbled meat mixture, made with chopped onion. OR make it right after preparing a fresh batch of the crumbled meat mixture and then freeze it. See tips following recipe for freezing prepared Sloppy Joes.



- 1 batch make-ahead crumbled beef made from 1-pound lean ground beef and 1 medium chopped onion (need not be thawed)
 - 1 teaspoon prepared mustard
 - 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
 - 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 - 1/4 teaspoon powdered garlic or 1 small clove garlic, minced
 - Salt (optional, according to taste)
 - 1 cup of no-salt added ketchup (**SUBSTITUTE:** 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce plus 1 tablespoon vinegar, such as cider vinegar, plus 1 tablespoon brown or white sugar can be substituted for the ketchup)
 - 1/4 cup water
 - 4 to 6 hamburger buns
1. Place all ingredients in a saucepan and simmer, covered, until meat is thawed and heated throughout, about 20 minutes; simmering also allows flavors to develop. Stir occasionally. Stir occasionally and add more water if the mixture becomes too thick.
 2. Spoon into buns and serve.

Freezing prepared Sloppy Joe mixture (suggested freezer storage time: 1 to 2 months for best quality)

Refrigerate Sloppy Joe mixture in a shallow pan in the refrigerator until cool. Then, freeze the Sloppy Joes according to one of these methods:

1. **To make individual servings:** Use one of these methods and freeze portions until firm enough to retain their shape – about 1 to 2 hours. Then transfer to a re-sealable freezer bag and press out air. **(1)** Freeze in a muffin tin. You may find it easiest to “pop” the frozen meat mixture from a silicone muffin tin. **(2)** OR Freeze in stand-alone silicone baking cups.
2. **To freeze a larger amount of meat mixture:** Freeze in a freezer bag in the amount you wish to serve. Flatten the freezer bag and press out air. Spread out in your freezer in single layers on a flat surface until frozen. Then, stack together.
3. **To thaw:** Thaw mixture for about 24 hours in the refrigerator. Thaw individual servings in some type of covered container in refrigerator. OR, defrost mixture in your microwave, following manufacturer’s directions. If the freezer bag manufacturer doesn’t provide specific instructions for defrosting food in their bags in the microwave, transfer the food to a microwave-safe container to thaw. Cook food immediately after microwave-defrosting.
4. **To reheat:** Reheat in a covered saucepan until meat is heated throughout (165 degrees F); stir occasionally. Or reheat, covered, in your microwave in a microwave safe container; stir occasionally. (See microwave Tip at beginning of recipe section.)



YOUR NOTES:

Chili with Beans and Beef (Makes 4 servings)

Prepare this recipe for eating right away, using 1/2 batch of frozen crumbled meat made with chopped onion (need not be thawed). OR make chili right after preparing a fresh batch of the crumbled meat; then freeze the chili. See freezer tips following the recipe



- 1/2 batch make-ahead crumbled beef made with onion (equals 1/2 pound lean ground beef *(need not be thawed – if the beef crumbles package is flattened when frozen, it's easy to break off about half the meat in the package for this recipe)*).
 - 1 can (15.5 ounces) regular or no-salt-added kidney beans, drained OR 1-1/2 cups cooked dry kidney beans, red beans or other bean of your choice (cook beans as instructed on package)
 - 1 can (14.5 ounces) regular or no-salt-added diced tomatoes
 - 1-1/2 tablespoons chili powder or to taste
1. Mix together all ingredients in a large pot. **TIP:** If your chili powder is a hotter variety, you may want to add less chili powder; you can always add more at the end of cooking.
 2. Cover, and simmer for about 20 minutes, until heated throughout. Stir occasionally. Add a little water, if needed, to thin the broth.
 3. Serve. May top with shredded cheese if desired.

Freezing chili with beans and beef (suggested freezer storage time: 1 to 2 months for best quality)

1. **To freeze chili:** Freeze in a freezer bag in the amount you wish to serve. Flatten the freezer bag and press out the air. Spread out in your freezer in single layers on a flat surface, until frozen. Then, stack together.
2. **To thaw:** Thaw mixture for about 24 hours in the refrigerator – place freezer bag on a plate. OR, defrost mixture in your microwave, following manufacturer's directions. If the freezer bag manufacturer doesn't provide specific instructions for defrosting food in their bags in the microwave, transfer the food to a microwave-safe container to thaw. Cook food immediately after microwave-defrosting.
3. **To reheat:** Reheat in a covered saucepan over low to medium heat until chili is heated throughout (165 degrees F); stir occasionally. OR reheat, covered, in your microwave in a microwave safe container; stir occasionally. (See microwave tip at beginning of recipe section.)

YOUR NOTES:

Pasta with Meat Sauce (Makes 4 servings)

Prepare this recipe for eating right away, using one batch of frozen crumbled meat made with chopped onion (need not be thawed). OR make the sauce right after preparing a fresh batch of the crumbled meat; then freeze the pasta meat sauce mixture. See freezer tips following the recipe for freezing prepared meat sauce for pasta.



- 1 batch make-ahead crumbled beef made from 1-pound lean ground beef and 1 medium chopped onion (need not be thawed)
 - 1 can (14.5 ounces) regular or no-salt added diced tomatoes
 - 1 can (8 ounces) regular or no-salt added tomato sauce
 - 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
 - 1/4 teaspoon powdered garlic or 1 small clove garlic, minced
 - 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
 - Salt (optional, according to taste)
 - 8 ounces of pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, etc.)
1. Place all ingredients, EXCEPT pasta, in a saucepan and simmer, covered, over low heat until meat is thawed and heated throughout, about 20 to 30 minutes; simmering also allows flavors to develop. Stir occasionally. Add more water if the mixture becomes too thick.
 2. While meat sauce is simmering, prepare 8 ounces of pasta (macaroni, spaghetti, noodles, etc.) according to package directions.
 3. Drain pasta; serve topped with meat sauce or mix pasta together with meat sauce before serving.

Freezing prepared pasta meat sauce (suggested freezer storage time: 1 to 2 months for best quality)

1. **To freeze pasta meat sauce:** Freeze in a freezer bag in the amount you wish to serve. Flatten the freezer bag and press out the air. Spread out in your freezer in single layers on a flat surface until frozen. Then, stack together.
2. **To thaw:** Thaw mixture for about 24 hours in the refrigerator – place freezer bag on a plate. I OR, defrost mixture in your microwave, following manufacturer’s directions. If the freezer bag manufacturer doesn’t provide specific instructions for defrosting food in their bags in the microwave, transfer the food to a microwave-safe container to thaw. Cook food immediately after microwave-defrosting.
3. **To reheat:** Reheat in a covered saucepan until sauce is heated throughout (165 degrees F); stir occasionally. OR reheat, covered, in your microwave in a microwave safe container; stir occasionally. (See microwave tip at beginning of recipe section.)

NOTE: As you’re reheating rather than cooking the pasta sauce in this case, you might start the process of cooking the spaghetti, macaroni, etc. before you begin heating the sauce.

Tip for freezing pasta: You may prefer the taste and texture of freshly prepared pasta. If you do freeze pasta, undercook it slightly and run it under cold water to cool it and stop the cooking process. For best results, freeze pasta separately from the meat sauce in the amount to be served, in a **flattened freezer bag** from which the air has been pressed out. Spread pasta in freezer in single layers on a flat surface until frozen. Then, stack together. When heating/reheating the meat sauce for serving, toss in the pasta and finish cooking **toward the end of heating the meat sauce**. Waiting until the sauce is almost heated helps prevent overcooking the pasta. You may need to add extra water to your sauce if the pasta absorbs some of the liquid.

YOUR NOTES: