

Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County  
444 Cherrycreek Road, Ste. A, Lincoln, NE 68528  
402-441-7180

<http://lancaster.unl.edu>

Email: [lancaster@unl.edu](mailto:lancaster@unl.edu) • Fax: 402-441-7148

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**ADMINISTRATIVE AIDE**

Jenny DeBuhr

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Jody Green, Alyssa Havlovic, Alice Henneman, Kristen Houska,  
Meghan Sittler, Tyler Williams

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**Where's the Beef? Frozen Make-Ahead Crumbled Beef**

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN  
Extension Educator

Did you know:

- 63 percent of in-home beef meals include ground beef.
- Nebraska has four times as many cattle as people.
- Agriculture is the #1 industry in Nebraska and cattle production represents the largest segment of the industry.

Here are some recipes and tips I gave out at a recent presentation on quick and healthy meals using frozen ground beef "crumbles."

**Frozen Make-Ahead Crumbled Beef — Basic Recipe**

1. Use 1 pound of 90 percent lean or higher ground beef to make one batch of make-ahead crumbled beef. 16 ounces (1 pound) of raw ground beef yields about 12 ounces fully cooked ground beef crumbles.
2. Brown no more than



Photos Alice Henneman, Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County

1 pound of ground beef at a time in a large skillet. As ground beef browns, some meat juices are released. If you overload the skillet, moisture is trapped and meat is steamed rather than browned.

3. Brown beef with one chopped medium onion as so many recipes call for both beef and onions. The onion also has antioxidant properties and slows flavor changes. Do not add salt now as it may hasten undesirable flavor changes. Add the salt when you use the crumbles in a recipe.

4. Brown lean ground beef in large nonstick skillet over medium heat 8-10 minutes or until beef is not pink, breaking beef up into 3/4-inch crumbles. Remove beef with slotted spoon.

**Storage**

1. 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 completely.

2. Promptly transfer the cooled beef crumbles to a plastic "freezer," NOT "storage" bag. Eliminate air pockets. Label and date package, including amount of beef or number of servings.

3. Speed freezing and hasten thawing by freezing crumbles in a thinner, flattened shape in freezer bag. 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.

4. Use frozen beef crumbles within 2-3 months for best flavor and quality. Freeze at 0°F or lower.



**HEALTHY EATING**

**ENJOY NEBRASKA FOODS!**

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN, Extension Educator

**CHILI WITH BEEF AND BEANS**

(4 servings)

Once you've made this "recipe" ... you'll never need to look at it again. Just keep cans of kidney beans and diced tomatoes on hand and you're ready to go!

- 1/2 batch of frozen make-ahead crumbled beef made with onion (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**
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) regular or no-salt-added diced tomatoes**
- 1-1/2 tablespoons chili powder or to taste**
- Shredded cheese (optional)**



Mix all ingredients in a saucepan. Cover, simmer for 20 minutes to heat throughout and blend flavors. Stir occasionally. Add a little water, if needed, to thin broth. Top with shredded cheese, if desired.

*Tip: Freeze extra chili with beef and beans (suggested freezer storage time: 1-2 months for best quality). 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. To reheat: Remove chili from freezer bag and reheat in a covered saucepan over low to medium heat until chili is heated throughout (165°F); stir occasionally. OR reheat, covered, in your microwave in a microwave safe container; stir occasionally.*

**PASTA WITH MEAT SAUCE**

- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- Extra virgin olive oil**
- 1 can (28-ounces) of crushed tomatoes**
- 1/2 to 1 batch of frozen make-ahead crumbled beef, thawed**



1. Sauté the garlic in a couple tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat in a large saucepan until it turns golden brown.
2. Add the tomatoes and the beef crumbles and continue heating over medium heat. Turn heat down once the mixture starts to simmer. Continue heating 10-15 minutes for flavors to blend. Meanwhile, prepare your pasta according to package directions.

*Tip: "Heat" up mixture by adding a dash of red pepper flakes. Add a teaspoon, or to taste, of Italian seasoning for added flavor. Eat any extra pasta sauce in 3-4 days or freeze and use in 2-3 months for best flavor.*