

# Food Storage

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Let's face it, most people have found outdated food in their food pantry or refrigerator. I've heard many people talk about the science experiments taking place in their refrigerator. The holidays may be one time of year that food is stored a bit longer than it should. Why not put an end to the food storage dilemma in your home?

Storage does not improve the quality of any food. The quality of a food will also not decrease significantly during storage as long as the food is stored properly and used within the recommended time frame.

The first thing to do is to start by understanding the dating on foods that you purchase. The most common types of dating on food are:

A "sell-by date" is the last recommended day of sale, but allows for limited home storage and use. The date is given after the statement, "Sell by (a date)." Many breads and baked goods have "sell-by dates."

"Best if used by (or before)" date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

A "use-by date" is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product. Some packaged goods have a "use-by date."

The "expiration date" is the last day the product should be used or eaten. You may also see it labeled as "do not use after (date)."

Some canned or packaged foods may have "pack dates" that tell you when the product was processed. This does not tell you how long the food will keep. Canned goods must exhibit a packing code to enable tracking of the product in interstate commerce. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall. These codes aren't meant for the consumer to interpret as "use-by" dates.

The second step is to know how long food can be stored. Commercially canned goods have varying storage dates. In general, high-acid canned foods such as tomatoes, grapefruit and pineapple can be stored on the shelf 12 to 18 months; low-acid canned foods such as meat, poultry, fish and most vegetables will keep 2 to 5 years. How long canned goods can be stored depends on storage conditions. The guidelines for storage assume that the can is kept in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, dry place. Basements that are damp are not as good a storage space as a pantry cupboard on the first or second floor of your home.

To add consumers in home food storage, UNH Cooperative Extension is offering a free publication on food storage. The Food Keeper guide provides appropriate storage times for fresh,

frozen and pre-packaged foods in your freezer, refrigerator and pantry. It also includes tips on maintaining the freshness and quality of food. As a result, consumers will have information on handling food products safely from the store to the table. The Food Keeper was developed by the Food Marketing Institute in cooperation with Cornell University.

Call UNH Cooperative Extension at (603) 447-3834 to receive your free copy of The Food Keeper. Written requests can be sent to UNH Cooperative Extension, PO Box 1480, Conway, NH 03818.

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