

## Food Storage: Pantry

### Maintain Quality & Safety

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.

Quality is not the same as safety. A poor-quality food may be safe, such as stale cereal, overripe fruit or soured pasteurized milk. An unsafe food may have good quality in terms of appearance and taste but have a high (unsafe) bacterial count. For example, improperly canned food may contain *Clostridium botulinum* (which causes botulism) thus making it unsafe. Or cooked chicken may be placed on a plate that held the raw chicken and become contaminated. The goal of home food storage is to provide both safe and high-quality foods.

Maintaining a food's quality depends on several factors: the quality of the raw product, the procedures used during processing, the way the food is stored and the length of storage. For example, fresh-picked corn will store better than corn that has been in the market for a few days; a tightly folded inside cereal box liner will prevent a ready-to-eat cereal from becoming limp. The recommended storage time takes these factors into consideration.

Since bacteria frequently get into food through careless food handling, keep everything - hands, pantry, shelves and storage containers - clean.

### Selection Guidelines

To help assure quality, some products have "open dates" on the package. Product dating is optional on most products. Dates may also be "coded" by the manufacturer and only understood by them.

**Sell-by Date:** This is the last recommended day of sale. The date allows for home storage and use. You will find the date after the statement, "Sell by (a date)." Breads and baked goods may have "sell-by dates."

**Use-by Date:** Tells how long the product will retain top quality after you buy it. You will find this date after the statement, "Use by." Some packaged goods have "use-by dates."

**Expiration Date:** This is the last day the product should be used or eaten. You may find this date after the statement, "Do not use after (date)." Yeast and baking powder have "expiration dates."

**Pack Date:** Canned or packaged foods may have dates, which tell you when the product was processed. This does not tell you how long the food will be good.

These are guidelines; if a food is not properly handled, its storage life will be shortened. Follow these tips for purchasing top-quality foods that have been handled safely.

### Storage Guidelines

For best results in maintaining product quality practice the rule: **FIRST IN, FIRST OUT**. This means you use the oldest products first and the newest products later. A good practice in the home is to place the newly purchased products in back of the same products already on the shelf. It may help to write purchase dates on products without "open dates" on the package. Follow recommended storage times for the refrigerator, freezer and pantry (See the chart on following pages.)

- Storage areas near oven ranges, hot water pipes or heating ducts should not be used because heat and moisture can cause a food to lose its quality more rapidly.

- Insect infestation can occur in any home. Susceptible foods include cereals, flour, seeds, baking mixes, spices, candy, dried fruits and dry pet foods. Avoid purchasing damaged packages of foods and keep cupboard shelves clean. Storing food in tightly sealed glass, metal or rigid plastic containers may help.
- High temperature or humidity may reduce storage time considerably.
- Pantry foods will probably be safe beyond recommended storage time, but eating quality (flavor and texture) and nutritive value will be reduced.

### Recommended Times for Foods Stored in the Pantry in Tightly Sealed or Airtight Containers

Staples	Recommended Times
<b>Bread &amp; Cakes</b>	
Store breads & cakes at room temperature. Storing in the refrigerator promotes staling. Use within 3-7 days or freeze.	
Bread Crumbs	4 months
Brown Rice	6 months
Cornmeal and hominy grits	12 months
Honey and syrups	1 year
Nonfat dry milk	1 year
Olive oil	6 months
Pasta	1-2 years
Rice	1 year
Shortening	2 years
Sugar, granulated	indefinitely
Sugar, brown or powdered	18 months
Vegetable oil	1 year
Wheat germ (unopened)	8-12 months
White flower	10-15 months
Whole wheat flour	3 months (best in refrigerator or freezer)
Wild rice	6 months
<b>Packaged Foods</b>	
Baking mix (biscuit, cake)	6 months
Cereals	12 months
Soup mix (dry)	12 months
<b>Dried Foods</b>	
Dried apricots	3 months (refrigerate after opening)
Dried prunes, raisins	9 months (refrigerate after opening)
Dried peas and beans	1 year
<b>Herbs, Spices &amp; Condiments</b>	
Salt, cream of tarter	indefinitely
Ground spices and herbs	2-3 years
Whole spices	4-5 years
Tabasco, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce	30 months
<b>Beverages (sealed, unopened)</b>	
Bottled water	2-5 years
Juices	12-18 months
Soft drinks	8 months
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	
Chocolate	2 years
Chocolate chips, cocoa	18 months
Coffee (canned)	12 months
Nuts (unshelled)	6-12 months
Peanut butter	3-4 months (best refrigerated)
Tapioca	4 years
Tea	18 months

## Recommended Times for Food Stored in Cool, Dry Pantry (65 To 70 °F)

Food	Recommended Times
Canned fruits, juices, tomatoes, pickles	12-18 months
Canned meats and vegetables	2-5 years
Home-canned foods	1 year
Onions	1-3 month at room temperature or below
Potatoes	1-3 months at 45-50 °F 1 week at room temperature
Squash, hard-rind	1-3 months at 60 °F 1 week at room temperature
Sweet potatoes	1-3 months at 60 °F 1 week at room temperature

### Source:

Minch, Daryl L., (February 1994.) *Home Storage of Foods Part I: Refrigerator and Freezer, and Part II: Pantry*. Rutgers Cooperative Extension, State University of New Jersey. <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS274>

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This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by P.H. Schmutz, Food Safety Specialist, and E.H. Hoyle, Extension Food Safety Specialist, Clemson University. (New 05/99.)

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