



Food Storage Charts

Safe Food Handling

Take some simple precautions when preparing food for storage. Always work with well-scrubbed hands and be sure all utensils, cutting boards, etc., are absolutely clean. Then keep food either hot (above 135°F) or cold (below 41°F), never in between for any length of time. Here's why: There are common bacteria present that are normally not troublemakers but can become dangerous if they are given the ideal breeding climate, between 70°F and 125°F, in which they quickly multiply to dangerous levels and can cause food poisoning. Don't leave foods in this danger zone for more than 2 hours.

To Refreeze or Not to Refreeze

You can safely refreeze virtually any partially thawed food as long as it still has ice crystals and has been held no longer than 1 to 2 days at refrigerator temperatures.

However, many foods—ice cream and uncooked baked goods, for example—will deteriorate in texture and taste.

Meat, fish, and poultry you've thawed in the refrigerator can be refrozen within 24 hours of defrosting. But do not refreeze combination dishes—pies, stews, casseroles, etc.

With the exception of fruit and juice concentrates, foods thawed accidentally in the freezer over a period of days (because of power failure) should not be refrozen unless they still have ice crystals. If food is completely thawed (on purpose or by accident), warmed to room temperature, and left for more than 2 hours, throw it out. Discard any fruit whose flavor is off.

Read the Labels

More and more foods are being sold now with a date that tells you

something about their freshness. But just what does it tell you? That depends on the kind of food. Here, are the most frequently used dates and what they mean:

- Fresh meat and fish are dated with “date of pack or manufacture,” which refers to when the food was packed or processed for sale. (See Refrigerator chart, page 3, for storage life.)
- Dairy and fresh bakery products are labeled with a “freshness, pull, or sell-by” date,” which refers to the last day the food should be sold. The date allows you a reasonable length of time to use the food.
- Frozen foods, fried snack foods, cereals, canned foods, macaroni, rice and other foods are labeled with a “use before or best-if-used by” date,” after which the quality of the food deteriorates. However, the food would still be safe to consume.



Revised by Janet Johnson, Regional Extension Agent. Originally prepared by Jean Weese, Professor, Auburn University

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Food Storage Charts



Pantry

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Store foods in your coolest kitchen cabinets, not over your range or near the refrigerator's exhaust. Dry foods keep fresh the longest in airtight containers, which also keep out insects. When shopping, choose fresh-looking packages; avoid cans with swollen ends or dents. Date your purchases; then check your kitchen cabinets every six months or so to be sure you use the oldest items first. With longer storage, flavors gradually fade and nutrients can be lost.

Food	Time	Special Handling
STAPLES		
Baking powder, soda	18 months	Keep all dry foods in original package or tightly closed airtight containers in dry spot unless otherwise directed on label.
Bouillon cubes, powder	1 year	
Bread, rolls	3 days	
Bread crumbs, dried	6 months	
Cereals, ready-to-eat ready-to-cook	Check date on package. 6 months	
Chocolate, premelted semisweet unsweetened	1 year 2 years 18 months	
Coffee, vacuum packed instant (closed)	1 year 6 months	Refrigerate after opening. Keep 2 weeks after opening.
Coffee lighteners, dry (opened)	6 months	
Condensed and evaporated milk	1 year	Refrigerate after opening.
Flour cake, all-purpose rye, whole-wheat	1 year	Keep refrigerated.
Gelatin, unflavored	3 years	
Honey, jams, syrups	1 year	
Molasses	2 years	
Nonfat dry milk	6 months	
Oil, salad	3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Pasta	2 years	
Peanut butter	6 months	Keep 2 months after opening.
Potatoes, instant	18 months	
Rice brown, wild white	1 year 2 years	
Salad dressings	3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Shortening, solid	8 months	
Sugar brown, confectioners' granulated	4 months 2 years	
Tea, bags, loose	18 months	
Tea, instant	2 years	

Food	Time	Special Handling
PACKAGED FOODS AND MIXES		
Cakes, prepared	2 days	
Cake mixes	1 year	
Casserole mixes	18 months	
Cookies, packaged	4 months	
Crackers	3 months	
Frosting, can or mix	8 months	
Hot-roll mix	18 months	
Pancake mix	6 months	
Piecrust mix	6 months	
Pies and pastries	3 days	Refrigerate cream, custard, chiffon fillings.
Pudding mixes	1 year	
Rice mixes	6 months	
Sauce, gravy, soup mixes	6 months	
Toaster pop-ups	3 months	
CANNED AND DRIED FOODS		
Fruits, canned dried	1 year 6 months	
Gravies, canned	1 year	
Meat, fish, poultry	1 year	
Pickles, olives	1 year	
Soups, canned dried	1 year 15 months	
Vegetables, canned	1 year	
Whipped-topping mix	1 year	
HERBS, SPICES, AND CONDIMENTS		
Barbeque sauce, ketchup, chili sauce (opened)	1 month	
Herbs and spices whole spices ground spices, herbs	1 year 6 months	Keep in cool spot. Replace if aroma fades. Refrigerate red spices.
Hot pepper sauce, Worcestershire	2 years	
MISCELLANY		
Coconut, can	1 year	
Metered-calorie products, instant breakfasts	6 months	
Nuts	9 months	
Parmesan cheese, grated	1 month	
Pasteurized cheese food and spreads	3 months	
Soft drinks	3 months	
Vegetables onions, potatoes, rutabagas, squash (hard-shelled), sweet potatoes	1 week at room temperature	For longer storage, keep at 50 to 60° F. Keep dry, out of sun, loosely wrapped.

Food Storage Charts



Refrigerator

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Keep the refrigerator temperature between 34 and 40° F. If it rises above 40° F, food quickly spoils. Wrap foods in foil, plastic wrap, or bags or place in airtight containers to keep food from drying out and odors from being transferred from one food to another. Food kept longer than the recommended times may be usable but of inferior quality.

Food	Time	Special Handling
DAIRY PRODUCTS		
Butter	1–3 months	Hold only 2-day supply in a butter keeper.
Buttermilk, sour cream, yogurt	2 weeks	
Cheese cottage, ricotta cream, Neufchatel hard and wax-coated (cheddar, edam, gouda, swiss, etc.) large pieces unopened opened sliced parmesan, grated processed (opened) spreads	5 days 2 weeks 3–6 months 3–4 weeks 2 weeks 12 months 3–4 weeks 2 weeks	Keep all cheese tightly packaged in moisture-resistant wrap. Unopened processed cheese need not be refrigerated.
Cream—light, heavy, half-and-half	1 week	Keep tightly covered.
Dips—sour cream, etc. commercial homemade	2 weeks 2 days	Keep tightly covered. Keep tightly covered.
Eggs in shell yolks whites	1 month 2–4 weeks 2–4 weeks	Keep small end of egg down to center yolks. Cover yolks with water; cover container.
Margarine	1 month	One week for best flavor.
Milk evaporated (opened) filled, imitation pasteurized, reliquified nonfat dry, skimmed sweetened condensed	1 week 3–4 days 1 week 1 week	Keep containers tightly closed. Do not return unused milk to original container. This spreads bacteria back to remaining milk.
Whipped topping, in can prepared from mix	3 months 3 days	
FRUIT		
Apples	1 month	Do not wash before storing—moisture encourages spoilage. Store in crisper or moisture-resistant bags or wrap. Keep fruit juices tightly covered. It is not necessary to remove canned fruit from the can.
Apricots, avocados, bananas, melons, nectarines, peaches, pears	5 days	
Berries, cherries	3 days	
Citrus fruit	2 weeks	
Grapes, plums	5 days	
Pineapple	2 days	
VEGETABLES		
Asparagus	3 days	
Beets, carrots, parsnips, radishes, turnips	2 weeks	Remove any leafy tops before refrigerating.
Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, green onions, zucchini	5 days	
Cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, peppers, tomatoes	1 week	If necessary, ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from light before refrigerating.
Corn	1 day	Leave in husk.
Lettuce, spinach, all leafy greens	5 days	Rinse and drain before refrigerating.
Limas, peas	5 days	Leave in shell.

Food	Time	Special Handling
MEATS		
Beef, lamb, pork, veal chops ground meat roasts steaks stew meat	3–5 days 1–2 days 3–5 days 3–5 days 1–2 days	If not prepacked, wrap loosely in wax paper so surface can dry slightly.
Variety meats (liver, heart, etc.)	1–2 days	
Processed meats* bacon, frankfurters hams (whole, halves) hams, canned (unopened) luncheon meat, slices sausage, fresh or smoked	1 week 1 week 6 months 5 days 2–3 days	Store in coldest part of refrigerator. Unopened vacuum packs keep about 2 weeks.
FISH AND SHELLFISH		
Fresh, cleaned fish steaks, fillets	1 day	Keep wrapped in plastic wrap or bag.
Clams, crab, lobster in shell	2 days	Cook only live shellfish.
Seafood—shucked clams, oysters, scallops, shrimp	1 day	
POULTRY		
Ready-to-cook chicken, duck, or turkey	2 days	May be stored in transparent wrap as purchased.
CANNED FOOD AFTER OPENING		
Baby food	2–3 days	Store baby food covered. Don't feed baby from jar; saliva may liquify food.
Fish, seafood; poultry	1 day	Store all canned foods tightly covered. It is not necessary to remove food from the can.
Fruit	1 week	
Gravy, broths	2 days	
Meats	2 days	
Pickles, olives	1 month	
Sauce, tomato-based	5 days	
Vegetables	3 days	
*Treat uncured or nitrite-free meats like fresh; refrigerate only 4 to 7 days.		

Food Storage Charts



Freezer

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Keep freezer at 0 °F, maximum 5 °F. Check temperature with a thermometer or use this rule of thumb: If the freezer can't keep ice cream brick-solid, the temperature is above the recommended level. If this is the case, use food within a week or two. To wrap for storage for 1 month or more, use moisture-vapor-resistant plastic wrap (may be specially coated or laminated), or heavy-duty foil. After times listed, food is safe, but flavors fade.

Food	Time	Special Handling
HOME-FROZEN FOODS		
Breads baked unbaked doughs	3 months 1 month	Use only special freezer-dough recipes.
Butter, margarine	9 months	
Cakes, baked	3 months	
Cookies, baked, dough	3 months	
Cheese dry-curd cottage, ricotta natural, hard	1 week 6 months	Creamed cottage cheese and cream cheese don't freeze well. Cut and wrap cheese in small pieces.
Cream (all kinds) whipped	2 months	Thawed cream may not whip.
Eggs, in shell		Do not freeze.
Egg whites, yolks	1 year	For sweet dishes: Mix each cup of yolks with 1 tablespoon corn syrup or sugar. For other cooking, substitute 1 teaspoon salt for sugar.
Fish, shellfish fatty fish—bluefish, catfish, trout, etc. lean fish—cod, flounder, etc. shellfish	3 months 6 months 3 months	For all fish and shellfish: Wrap tightly in heavy-duty foil or freezer wrap.
Ice cream, sherbet	1 month	
Main dishes, cooked meat, fish poultry	3 months 6 months	Freeze in freezer- and oven-proof baking dishes or freezer containers.
Meat bacon frankfurters ground, stew meat ham leftover cooked roasts beef, lamb pork, veal steaks, chops beef lamb, veal pork variety meats	1 month 1–2 months 3 months 2 months 3 months 1 year 8 months 1 year 9 months 9 months 4 months	If meat is purchased fresh and wrapped in plastic wrap, check for holes. If none, freeze in this wrap for up to 2 weeks. For longer storage, overwrap tightly with freezer or heavy-duty foil. Keep frankfurters in vacuum packages.
Nuts	3 months	
Pies custard (homemade) fruit	8 months	Do not freeze. Freeze baked or unbaked.

Food	Time	Special Handling
Poultry cooked, with gravy cooked, no gravy uncooked (whole) chicken, turkey duck, goose uncooked (parts) chicken turkey	6 months 1 month 1 year 6 months 9 months 9 months	Wrap in heavy-duty foil or freezer wrap as airtight as possible. Thaw uncooked poultry in refrigerator or under cool running water. Cook within 2 days of thawing.
Vegetables	1 year	
COMMERCIALLY FROZEN FOODS		
Breads baked unbaked	3 months Check label.	
Cakes angelfood layer cake, frosted pound, yellow cake	2 months 4 months 6 months	
Coffee lighteners	1 year	
Doughnuts, pastries	3 months	
Fish fatty fish—mackerel, trout, etc. lean fish—cod, flounder, etc.	3 months 6 months	
Shellfish Alaskan king crab breaded, cooked lobsters, scallops shrimp, unbreaded	10 months 3 months 3 months 1 year	
Fruit	1 year	
Ice cream, sherbet	1 month	
Juices, concentrates	1 year	
Main dishes, pies, fish, meat poultry	3 months 6 months	
Meat beef, roasts, steaks ground lamb, veal roasts, steaks pork chops roasts	1 year 4 months 9 months 4 months 8 months	
Pancake, waffle batter	3 months	
Pies	8 months	
Poultry chicken, turkey (parts) chicken, turkey (whole bird) duck, goose turkey rolls, roasts	6 months 1 year 6 months 6 months	
Frozen dinners	6 months	
Vegetables	8 months	