

Consumer and Family Sciences



Department of Foods and Nutrition

Spotlight on Cupboard Storage

Adapted by
April C. Mason, Ph.D.,
and William D. Evers,
Ph.D., RD

Unless we are like Mother Hubbard and our cupboard is bare, most of us want to increase our “know how” about cupboard food storage. We want food to look and taste good. We want it to retain the nutrients it had when we purchased it. We need to know that it is safe to eat. If we know how to store food properly and how long it will keep, we will waste fewer food dollars.

Store foods in cool cabinets. Put dishes or pans in the cabinets over the range, near the dishwasher or by the refrigerator exhaust. In those places, the temperature is too warm for food. Store potatoes and onions in the coolest parts of your cupboard. Foods in glass jars should be kept in a dark place.

Can do's . . . and don'ts

Canned foods do have a long shelf life, but don't neglect them for several years and then suddenly decide to use them. These old canned goods may be safe to eat, but their color, flavor, texture and/or nutritive value may have deteriorated.

Store canned foods in a dry place at moderately cool, but not freezing, temperatures. Rotate foods. Try not to keep canned foods more than one year. Canned fruit juices should not be kept more than nine months. The shelf life will be shorter when canned goods are stored above 70° F. A slight breakdown of texture may result from freezing some canned foods, but otherwise a single freezing and thawing does not affect them adversely (unless the seal is broken).

Here are some can safety tips:

- Bulging cans — Spoiled! Throw away!
- Dented cans — Do not buy cans with dents on the side seam of the can or on the rim seams

at the top or bottom of the can. Check carefully for leakage, especially around the seam. Throw leaky cans away.

- Rusty cans — Check for leakage. The rust may have penetrated the can.

Bread

Bread keeps fresh if stored at room temperature in a cool, dry place. Refrigeration hastens staling; however, in hot, humid weather, bread kept for more than two or three days should be refrigerated to retard mold growth.

Store brown-and-serve breads, English muffins, and other high-moisture breads in the refrigerator.

Keep hard-crust breads (e.g. French bread) at room temperature and use within one or two days of purchase. These breads are made with water rather than milk and dry quickly.



Most breads are packaged in moisture- and vapor-proof wraps (polyethylene bags), which are good for storage. Other containers used to store bread should be kept clean with a solution of baking soda and water rather than soap. The odor of soap may transfer to the bread.

For longer storage, freeze fresh bread. Freezing will not freshen bread. Frozen bread only keeps the freshness it had when it was put in the freezer.

Flour

Store flour in an airtight container, since it takes up moisture and also dries out easily. If you buy a large bag, leave the flour in the bag and store in a large covered container. In hot humid weather, buy flour in small amounts and keep in the refrigerator or freezer. If you store flour in a warm place, you are likely to have company — insects.

Keep whole wheat flour in the refrigerator year-round. Natural oils cause this flour to turn rancid quickly at room temperature.

Flour absorbs odors. Do not store near soap powders, medicines, or other items with strong odors.

Brown sugar

If brown sugar is so hard that it is difficult to measure out, spread it (as best you can) on a cookie sheet and heat in a slow oven (250° to 300° F). When softened, remove sugar from oven and measure it while still warm; it will harden again when cooled.

To keep brown sugar soft, put it in a plastic bag or, better yet, in a jar with a tight lid. Slipping an apple slice in with the brown sugar will also do the trick. Check occasionally to see that the slice has not dried out or become moldy.

Vegetables and fruits

Dry onions, potatoes, rutabagas, and winter squash usually keep best in cool (preferably around 50° to 60° F) dark places. Onions and white potatoes will sprout in the spring; so during the spring, only buy what you can use in a week.

Do not refrigerate sweet potatoes. Cold temperatures (below 50° F) cause starch changes, which alter the flavor.

Ripen tomatoes at room temperature. Do not put them in direct sunlight. When ripe, store tomatoes in the refrigerator.

Ripen bananas at room temperature to desired maturity. Ripened bananas may be refrigerated to prevent further ripening for two to three days.

Store apples in a cool place (below 60° F) during the fall following harvest. After this time, they deteriorate rapidly and should be kept in the refrigerator.

Ripen firm avocados and cantaloupe at room temperature. Allow three to five days for avocados; two to four days for cantaloupe.

How to crisp foods

When cereals, crackers, or snacks get stale, spread onto a cookie sheet and place in a 425-degree oven. They will be crisp again in a few minutes, provided they have no off-flavors.

Cupboard Storage Chart

Temperature. Store foods in your coolest cabinets, away from appliances, which produce heat.

Time. Many staples and canned foods have a relatively long shelf life, but buy only what you expect to use within the time recommended in the chart for each product. Date food packages and use the oldest first. Geographic area will affect recommended storage time. Warm and humid climates shorten the shelf life of foods.

Purchasing. Buy fresh-looking packages. Dusty cans or torn labels may indicate old stock. Carefully check dented cans before buying. Do not purchase bulging cans.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 70°F	Handling Hints
Staples		
Baking powder	18 months or expiration date on can	Keep dry and covered.
Baking soda	2 years	Keep dry and covered.
Bouillon cubes or granules	2 years	Keep dry and covered.
Bread crumbs, dried	6 months	Keep dry and covered.
Cereals:		
ready-to-eat (unopened)	6-12 months*	
ready-to-eat (opened)	2-3 months	Refold package liner tightly after opening.
cooked	6 months	
Chocolate:		
premelted	12 months	Keep cool.
semi-sweet	2 years	Keep cool.
unsweetened	18 months	Keep cool.
Chocolate syrup:		
(unopened)	2 years*	
(opened)	6 months	Cover tightly. Refrigerate after opening.
Cocoa mixes	8 months	Cover tightly.
Coffee:		
cans (unopened)	2 years*	Refrigerate after opening; keep tightly closed.
cans (opened)	2 weeks	Use dry measuring spoon.
instant (unopened)	1-2 years*	
instant (opened)	2 weeks	
Coffee lighteners (dry):		
(unopened)	9 months*	
(opened)	6 months	Keep lid tightly closed.
Cornmeal	12 months	Keep tightly closed.
Cornstarch	18 months	Keep tightly closed.



Food	Recommended Storage Time at 70°F	Handling Hints
Flour:		
white	6-8 months	Keep in airtight container.
whole wheat	6-8 months	Keep refrigerated. Store in airtight container.
Gelatin, all types	18 months	Keep in original container.
Grits	12 months	Store in airtight container.
Honey	12 months	Cover tightly. If it crystallizes, warm jar in pan of hot water.
Jellies and jams	12 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Molasses:		
(unopened)	12 months*	
(opened)	6 months	Keep tightly closed. Refrigerate to extend storage life.
Marshmallow cream (unopened)	3-4 months	Cover tightly. Refrigerate after opening to extend storage life. Serve at room temperature.
Marshmallows	2-3 months	Keep in airtight container.
Mayonnaise (unopened)	2-3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Milk:		
condensed or evaporated (unopened)	12 months	Invert cans every 2 months.
nonfat dry (unopened)	6 months*	
nonfat dry (opened)	3 months	Put in airtight container.
Pasta (Spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)	2 years	Once opened, store in airtight container.
Pectin, liquid (opened)	1 month	Recap and refrigerate.
Rice:		
white	2 years	Keep tightly closed.
flavored or herb	6 months	
Salad dressings:		
bottled (unopened)	10-12 months*	
bottled (opened)	3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
prepared	2 weeks	Refrigerate prepared dressing.
Salad oils:		
(unopened)	6 months*	
(opened)	1-3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Shortenings, solid	8 months	Refrigeration not needed.
Sugar:		
brown	4 months	Put in airtight container.
confectioners	18 months	Put in airtight container.
granulated	2 years	Cover tightly.
artificial sweeteners	2 years	Cover tightly.

Food	Recommended Storage Time at 70°F	Handling Hints
Syrups	12 months	Keep tightly closed. Refrigerate to extend storage life.
Tea:		
bags	18 months	Put in airtight container.
instant	3 years	Cover tightly.
loose	2 years	Put in airtight container.
Vinegar:		
(unopened)	2 years*	
(opened)	12 months	Keep tightly closed. Slightly cloudy appearance doesn't affect quality. Distilled vinegar keeps longer than cider vinegar.
Mixes and Packaged Foods		
Biscuit, brownie, muffin mix	9 months	Keep cool and dry.
Cakes, purchased	1-2 days	If cake contains butter-cream, whipped cream, or custard frostings or fillings, refrigerate.
Cake mixes	9 months	Keep cool and dry.
angel food	12 months	
Casserole mixes, complete or add own meat	9-12 months	Keep cool and dry.
Cookies:		
homemade	2-3 weeks	Put in airtight container.
packaged	2 months	Keep box tightly closed.
Crackers	8 months	Keep box tightly closed.
Frosting:		
canned	3 months	Store leftovers in refrigerator.
mix	8 months	
Hot-roll mix	18 months	If opened, put in airtight container.
Pancake mix	6-9 months	Put in airtight container.
Piecrust mix	8 months	Keep cool and dry.
Pies and pastries	2-3 days	Refrigerate whipped cream, custard, and chiffon fillings.
Potatoes, instant	6-12 months	Keep in airtight package.
Pudding mixes	12 months	Keep cool and dry.
Rice, mixes	6 months	Keep cool and dry.
Sauce and gravy mixes	6-12 months	Keep cool and dry.
Soup mixes	12 months	Keep cool and dry.
Toaster pastries	2-3 months	Keep in airtight packet.



Food	Recommended Storage Time at 70°F	Handling Hints
Canned and Dried Foods		
Canned foods, all (unopened)	12 months*	Keep cool.
Canned fruit juices	9 months*	Keep cool.
Canned foods (opened)		
baby foods	2-3 days	All canned foods: Refrigerate and cover tightly. To avoid metallic taste, transfer foods in cans to glass or plastic storage containers if kept more than 1 day.
fish and seafood	2 days	
fruit	1 week	
meats	2 days	
pickles, olives	1-2 months	
poultry	2 days	
sauce, tomato	5 days	
vegetables	3 days	
Fruits, dried	6 months	Keep cool, in airtight container, or refrigerate.
Vegetables, dried	1 year	Keep cool, in airtight container, or refrigerate.
Spices, Herbs, Condiments, and Extracts		
Catsup, chili sauce:		
(unopened)	12 months*	Refrigerate for longer storage.
(opened)	1 month	
Mustard, prepared yellow:		
(unopened)	2 years*	May be refrigerated. Stir before using.
(opened)	6-8 months	
Spices and herbs:		
whole spices	1-2 years	Store in airtight containers in dry places away from sunlight and heat. At times listed, check aroma; if faded, replace. Whole cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon sticks maintain quality beyond 2-year period.
ground spices	6 months	
herbs	6 months	
herb-spice blends	6 months	
Vanilla:		
(unopened)	2 years*	Keep tightly closed. Volatile oils escape.
(opened)	12 months	
other extracts (unopened)	12 months	



Food	Recommended Storage Time at 70°F	Handling Hints
Vegetable, dehydrated flakes	6 months	
Others		
Cheese, Parmesan — grated:		
(unopened)	10 months*	
(opened)	2 months	Refrigerate after opening. Keep tightly closed.
Coconut, shredded — canned or packaged:		
(unopened)	12 months*	
(opened)	6 months	Refrigerate after opening.
Meat substitutes and textured protein products (e.g. imitation bacon bits)		
	4 months	Keep tightly closed. For longer storage, refrigerate.
Metered-caloric products, instant breakfast		
	6 months	Keep in can, closed jars, or original packets.
Nuts:		
in-shell (unopened)	4 months*	Refrigerate after opening. Freeze for longer storage. Unsalted and blanched nuts keep longer than salted.
nutmeats packaged (unopened):		
vacuum can	1 year*	
other packaging	3 months*	
nutmeats (unopened)	2 weeks	
Peanut butter:		
(unopened)	6-9 months*	Refrigeration not needed.
(opened)	2-3 months	Keeps longer if refrigerated. Use at room temperature.
Peas, beans-dried	12 months	Store in airtight container in cool place.
Popcorn	2 years	Store in airtight container.
Vegetables, fresh:		
onions	2 weeks	Keep dry and away from sun. For longer storage, keep at about 50°F. Don't refrigerate sweet potatoes.
potatoes, white	2 weeks	
sweet potatoes	2 weeks	
Whipped topping (dry)	12 months	Keep cool and dry.
Yeast, dry	Expiration date on package	



*Total time unopened product can be stored at home. If recommendation is for opened product, subtract this time from the total home storage or “unopened” time.

Related publications

Contact the Extension office in your county for copies of the following related publications, or download pdf files directly from the World Wide Web.

CFS-422-W, *Spotlight on Freezer Storage*
www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-422-W.pdf

CFS-424-W, *Spotlight on Refrigerator Storage*
www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-424-W.pdf

You also can order publications from:

Ag Comm — MDC
Purdue University
1187 Service Building
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1187

Order by e-mail to Media.Order@ces.purdue.edu
or by fax to Ag Comm-MDC at (765) 496-1540
or by telephone to (765) 494-6794 or 888-EXT-
INFO (398-4636)

*Credit is extended to Sharon Van Dyne,
Consumer Marketing Specialist, Cooperative
Extension Service, Michigan State University, for
development of this publication.*

REVIEWED 12/01

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, David C. Petritz, Director, that all persons shall have equal opportunity and access to the programs and facilities without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, or disability. Purdue University is an Affirmative Action employer.

This material may be available in alternative formats.

1-888-EXT-INFO

<http://www.agriculture.purdue.edu/AgComm/>