



MARCH 2017



Update...Cleaning the Kitchen Cupboard

Have you looked, really looked, at the foods in your kitchen cupboards lately? Is it time to toss out a few items? Should others be moved to a better location or storage container? The following storage tips are based on food stored at room temperature of about 70 degrees F. The times are those generally cited for maintaining best food quality. A range of times and the more conservative recommendations are given to allow for age of the product when purchased, how long it has been opened, etc. Read labels carefully! They often contain important storage information and recommended "use by" dates.

Baking Soda and Baking Powder

Store tightly covered in a dry place. Make sure measuring utensils are dry before dipping into the container. Can be stored 12-18 months or expiration date on container. To test baking soda for freshness: place 1 ½ teaspoons in a small bowl. Add 1 tablespoon vinegar. If it fizzes, then it will still help leaven a food. If it doesn't fizz, use it as an odor catcher in the refrigerator. To test baking powder for freshness: mix 1 teaspoon baking powder with 1/3 cup hot water. If it foams vigorously, it still has rising power.

Canned Foods

Can be stored 1-2 years. The Canned Foods Institute recommends eating canned food within 2 years of processing for best quality. Many cans will include a "for best quality use by" date stamped on the can. Avoid refrigerating opened canned foods in their can. Food can develop an off-odor from the can once it is opened.

White Flour

Can be stored 6-12 months. Store in a cool, dry place. It is important to store flour in an airtight

container or freezer bag to preserve the flour's moisture content. Exposure to low or high humidity will affect the flour's moisture content and may affect the outcome of a recipe. For longer storage, keep white flour in the refrigerator in an airtight container. All-purpose and bread flour will keep up to two years at 40 degrees F in your refrigerator. They can be stored indefinitely in the freezer. As a general rule, when measuring flour from refrigerated or frozen flour, allow the measure portion to come to room temperature before using it in baked goods. Remove the flour for your recipe a few hours before use so it doesn't affect the action of other ingredients such as baking powder or yeast.

Honey

Honey may be stored up to 12 months. Honey stores best at room temperature. It tends to crystallize more rapidly in the refrigerator. This is a natural process in which the liquid turns solid. You can place a jar of crystallized honey in warm water and stir until the crystals dissolve.

Shortening

Shortening can be stored 8-12 months if not opened; 3-8 months once opened. Store in a tightly closed container in a cool, dark place. Shortening that has been stored too long will go rancid and develop an undesirable taste and odor. If you haven't used shortening for a while, smell it before using it in a recipe.

Brown Sugar

Can be stored 4-6 months for maximum flavor. It is very important to store brown sugar in an airtight container to keep its moisture and prevent it from turning hard. Either store it in its original plastic bag, tightly closed, or transfer to an airtight container or a heavy moisture-proof plastic bag such as a freezer bag. To soften brown sugar, heat in a 250 degree oven for a few minutes. Watch it carefully and as soon as it is soft, measure the amount that you need. When the sugar cools, it

will become hard again. The sugar will be very hot! To soften in a microwave, place in a container and cover loosely with a clean, white, wet (but not dripping wet) paper towel. Microwave on high and check every 30 seconds. When the sugar cools, it will become hard again. The sugar will be very hot!

White Sugar

Can be stored up to 2 years. Store in an airtight container or a heavy moisture-proof plastic bag such as a freezer bag. To soften hardened white sugar, place in a sturdy freezer bag and pound it with a meat pounder or hammer.

Vegetable Oil

Vegetable oil can be stored 1-6 months after opening; 6-12 months unopened. Store in a tightly closed container in a cool, dark place. Oil that has been stored too long will go rancid and develop an undesirable taste and odor. If you haven't used oil in a while, smell it before using it in a recipe. You can extend the life of oil by storing it in the refrigerator. Some may become cloudy in the refrigerator but usually clear up after sitting at room temperature to warm up.

Vinegar

Can be stored up to 2 years unopened; 1 year after opening. Keep vinegar tightly covered. White vinegar will maintain unchanged longer than other type of vinegar. The storage life of vinegar is almost indefinite because of its acidic nature.

Managing Your Kitchen Cupboard

Here are a few other tips for taking control of storing foods in your cupboard:

*If you threw away portions of expired food, buy a smaller container next time.

*Keep a marker in your kitchen and put the date, month and year, you purchased the food on the container.

*Practice "first in, first out" for foods. If you have purchased several containers of the same type of food, arrange the containers so that you reach for the oldest package first.

*Read labels carefully for storage information and possible recommended "use by" dates. "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. A "sell-by" date tells the store how long to display the product

for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires. "Best if used by" dates are recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

References: "Cook it Quick!", University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County, 2004 and "Food Reflections," University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County, January 2005.



Featured Recipes

Scalloped Corn

1 17-ounce can cream style corn

1 cup milk

1 egg, beaten

1 cup saltine cracker crumbs*

1/4 cup chopped onion

1/2 teaspoon salt

Ground pepper to taste

2 teaspoons margarine

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 1-quart casserole with nonstick spray. In a medium bowl, combine corn, milk and egg; stir until mixed well. Add 3/4 cup of the crumbs, onion, salt and pepper. Mix well; pour into casserole. Melt the margarine in a small skillet. Add the remaining 1/4 cup cracker crumbs; stir to coat all the crumbs. Sprinkle crumbs over the corn mixture. Bake for 35 minutes. Serve hot. Per serving: 150 calories, 4 grams fat, 26 grams carbohydrates. *To make cracker crumbs easily...put the crackers into a plastic sandwich bag and crush them with the bottom of a glass.

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