

THE SHELF LIFE GUIDE



Help us prevent
food waste in
Los Angeles County.

You might be throwing hundreds of dollars' worth of food in the trash! Save money and prevent food waste by learning more about shelf life.

LOS ANGELES REGIONAL



Fighting Hunger. Giving Hope.

A young girl with dark curly hair, wearing a striped shirt, is smiling and eating at a wooden table outdoors. She is using a fork and knife to eat a meal consisting of yellow rice, a piece of meat, and a piece of orange. In the background, another person is partially visible, and the setting appears to be a sunny outdoor area with greenery.

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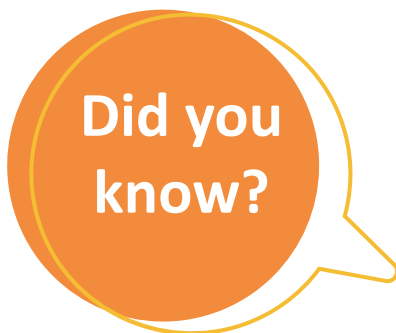
Product Shelf Life 10

Food insecurity in our community is not caused by food scarcity. Millions of our neighbors struggle with food insecurity, 30-40 percent of the food supply goes to waste. By following the information in this Shelf Life Guide, you can reduce food waste in your daily life which will help keep perfectly good food out of landfills.

Purchasing only what we need and utilizing our food efficiently reduces the amount of fresh and nutritious food going to waste. Unpurchased – but perfectly good – food can be donated by growers and grocers, then redirected to our neighbors in need.

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank's primary goal is to provide nutritious food for our neighbors in need, but we know that the health of our community depends on the health of our overall environment, so the Food Bank also works to fight food waste. When food breaks down, it releases methane — a gas 86 times more powerful than carbon dioxide and a significant factor in global climate change. By following the tips in this Shelf Life Guide, you are making a positive impact on your community and your planet.

Thank you for your participation, and please share this Shelf Life Guide with your friends and family members. Anyone can download this guide for free at LAFoodBank.org/shelf-life.



The average American household throws away \$2,200 worth of food each year. Giving that money to the Food Bank instead would help us provide approximately 8,800 meals to our neighbors in need.

DECODING DATE CODES

EXPIRATION DATE

FOUND ON

Baby food, formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder.

WHAT IT MEANS

Do **NOT** distribute or use after the expiration date! Yeast and baking powder work less well, but are safe to eat.

EXPIRES MM/DD/YY
DO NOT USE AFTER MM/DD/YY

PACK DATE

FOUND ON

Canned foods, crackers, cookies, spices.

WHAT IT MEANS

This is the date the food was packaged, often displayed in a numerical code. Usually this food is of good quality and safe to eat for a long time past the date.

Packed on MM/DD/YY
22#5306412
KL064



SELL BY

FOUND ON

Refrigerated foods such as milk, yogurt, eggs, lunch meat.

WHAT IT MEANS

The store must sell these foods before the code date listed. If the food has been handled properly it is still safe to eat and the quality is good.

SELL BY DATE
MM/DD/YY
Pull Date

USE BY

FOUND ON

Crackers, cookies, cold cereals and other dry, shelf stable food.

WHAT IT MEANS

The manufacturer's recommendation for how long the food will be at peak quality. After this date, the food is still safe to eat but begins to lose nutrients and quality.

BEST IF USED BY DATE
MM/DD/YY



TIPS ON STORING FRESH PRODUCE

Most fruits and vegetables keep the best quality when refrigerated. However, there are some exceptions.

Tomatoes taste best if not refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become grainy.

Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within one or two days. Refrigeration will cause the banana's skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.

If they are very fresh; apples, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.

Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes and winter squash can be stored in cool, dark places outside of the cooler.



Most fruits and vegetables keep the best quality when refrigerated. However, there are some exceptions.

PROPER STORAGE TEMPERATURE

DRY STORAGE

Temperature between
50° - 70°F.

Rotate stock so that older
foods are distributed first.



REFRIGERATOR

Temperature should be
between 32°F - 40°F.

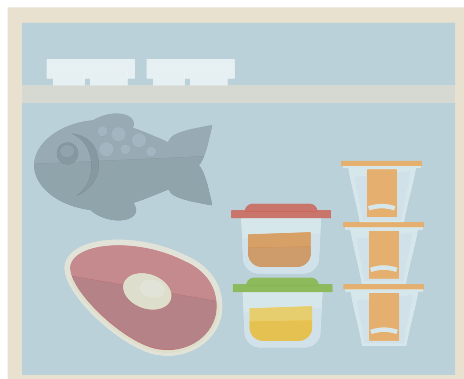
Set refrigerator air temperature
at 39°F to maintain internal
temperature of food at 41°F.

Leave space for air to
circulate between items.

FREEZER

Temperature should be 0°F.

Freezer can be as cold as
-20°F if you have something
like ice cream present.



WHAT NOT TO CONSUME

TIPS ON STORING DRY GOODS

Store cans and boxes off the floor, and 18 inches away from the wall.

Store canned and boxed goods in a clean, dry and cool area (below 85°F).

Extremely hot (over 100°F) and cold (below 30°F) temperatures can damage canned goods and shorten shelf life.

Always rotate your stock. Use older products before newer ones.



You can use this Shelf Life Guide to save money on your groceries and pay it forward! Donors who give \$23 per month provide a year's worth of food to a neighbor in need. Join now at LAFoodBank.org/give-monthly.





**DISCARD
WHEN**

CANS & JARS

Leaking or stained
Swollen can
Rusty
Badly dented, crimped
or pinched
Container is cracked
Foul odor
Safety seals are broken
or missing
Lids are loose or missing
Food exhibits changed
color or odor—**never
taste suspicious foods!**

BOXES

Boxes with an inside bag:

Bag is torn or leaking
Bag has moldy or foreign
objects inside
Bag seals are ripped

Boxes without an inside bag:

Box is open or torn
Box is stained or wet

PRODUCT SHELF LIFE

CONDIMENTS & SAUCES



PANTRY STORED

REFRIGERATION AFTER OPENING

Barbecue sauce (bottled)	1 year	4 months
Jams, jellies and preserves	6-18 months	6-12 months
Ketchup, cocktail, or chili sauce	1 year	6 months
Mayonnaise, commercial	3-6 months	2 months
Mustard	1-2 years	1 year
Olives, black and green	12-18 months	2 weeks
Pickles	1 year	1-3 months
Salad dressing, commercial	10-12 months	1-3 months
Salsa, picante and taco sauces	1 year	1 month
Spaghetti sauce, in jars	18 months	4 days
Vinegar	2 years	
Worcestershire sauce	1 year	

Tip: When you open a package, write the date on it!



BABY FOOD



	AFTER OPENING	PANTRY TIPS
Cereal, dry mixes	1 month, if pantry stored	Should be discarded after use-by date
Formula, prepared	1 hour, if pantry stored 1 day, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date
Jars or pouches	2-3 days, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date
Liquid concentrate or ready-to-feed formula	2 days, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date

CANNED FOODS



	PANTRY STORED	REFRIGERATION AFTER OPENING
Beans	2-5 years	3-4 days
Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel	2-5 years	3-4 days
Fruit	12-18 months	5-7 days
Juices	12-18 months	5-7 days
Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey	10-12 months	3-4 days
Soups	2-5 years	3-4 days
Tomato soup	12-18 months	5-7 days
Vegetables	2-5 years	3-4 days

BAKING & COOKING



	PANTRY STORED	AFTER OPENING
Biscuit or Pancake mix	12 months	
Baking mixes (brownie, cake)	12-18 months	3-6 months pantry
Baking Powder	6-18 months	6 months pantry
Baking Soda	2-3 years	2 years pantry 1 year refrigerated
Cornmeal, regular	6-22 months	2-4 months refrigerated
Cornmeal, stone ground or blue	1 month	6-8 months pantry 1 year refrigerated
Flour, white	6-12 months	6-8 months refrigerated
Flour, whole wheat	3-6 months	2-3 weeks refrigerated
Frosting or icing	10-12 months	3-5 months pantry 4 months refrigerated
Oils, olive or vegetable	6-12 months	3-4 months pantry
Pudding mixes (shelf stable)	12 months	6-12 months pantry
Shortening, solid	12-18 months	2-3 years pantry
Spices, ground	6-18 months	Indefinitely pantry
Sugar substitutes	2-3 years	18-24 months pantry
Sugar (brown, confectioners, granulates)	6-22 months	



Did you know?

The LA Regional Food Bank and Food Bank partners reach hundreds of thousands of people each month. Learn more at LAFoodBank.org/facts

BAKERY



	PANTRY STORED	REFRIGERATION AFTER OPENING	STORED FROZEN
Commercial bread products (pan bread, flat bread, rolls and buns)	12 months	2-3 weeks	3-5 months
Commerical cakes and muffins	3-7 days	7-10 days	6 months
Cookies, crispy	4-6 months		8-12 months
Cookies, soft	2-3 months		8-12 months
Corn tortillas	7-10 days	6-8 weeks	6-8 months
Flour tortillas	1 week	3-4 weeks	6-8 months
Pita bread	2-4 days	4-7 days	4 months
Pastries, danish	5-10 days	14 months	Do not freeze
Tortillas	3 months	3 months	6 months
Whole wheat tortillas	1 week	3-4 weeks	6-8 months



DAIRY PRODUCTS & EGGS



	REFRIGERATOR	FROZEN
Butter	1-2 months	6-9 months
Buttermilk	1-2 weeks	3 months
Cheese, hard (cheddar, Swiss, block parmesan)	6 months 3-4 weeks, if refrigerated after opening	6 months
Cheese, processed slices	3-4 weeks	
Cheese, shredded (cheddar, mozzarella, etc.)	1 month	3-4 months
Cheese, soft (brie, bel paese)	1-2 weeks	6 months
Coffee creamer, liquid refrigerated	3 weeks	
Cottage cheese, ricotta	2 weeks 1 week, if refrigerated after opening	
Cream cheese	2 weeks	
Cream, half-and-half	3-4 days	4 months
Cream, heavy	10 days	3-4 months
Cream, light	1 week	3-4 months
Egg substitutes, liquid	7 days	
Eggs, in shell	3 days, if refrigerated after opening	
Margarine	3-5 weeks	12 months
Milk, plain or flavored	Package use-by date	3 months
Pudding	1 week	
Sour cream	Package use-by date	
Whipped cream, aerosol can	3-4 weeks	
Whipped topping, aerosol can	3 months	
Whipped topping, tub	2 weeks	14 months
Yogurt	1-2 weeks	1-2 months

Did you know?

Food waste is one of the single largest components in municipal landfills.

DELI & PREPARED FOODS



REFRIGERATOR

FROZEN

Cooked pasta	3-5 days	1-2 months
Cooked rice	4-6 days	6 months
Fruit, cut	Package use-by date 4 days, if refrigerated after opening	
Guacamole	3-4 days	3-4 months
Hummus, commercial	3 months 7 days, if refrigerated after opening	
Hummus, traditional	7 days	
Leftovers, pizza	3-4 days	1-2 months
Leftovers (without meat, fish, poultry or egg i.e. cooked vegetables, rice or potatoes)	3-4 days	1-2 months
Leftovers (with meat, fish, poultry or egg)	3-4 days	2-3 months
Luncheon meat or poultry, pre-packaged	2 weeks 3-5 days, if refrigerated after opening	1-2 months
Luncheon meat or poultry, store-sliced	3-5 days	1-2 months
Main dishes or meals, hot or refrigerated	3-4 days	2-3 months
Meats, covered with gravy or broth	3-4 days	6 months
Salads (containing meat, fish, poultry or eggs)	3-4 days	
Salads, vegetable	3-5 days	
Soups, stews	3-4 days	2-3 months



FOOD PURCHASED FROZEN



FROZEN

Bread, bagels	3 months
Chicken, nuggets/patties	2 months
Desserts, frozen baked goods	3-4 months
Desserts, frozen cream pies	1-2 months
Desserts, frozen fruit pies	6-8 months
Dough, commercial (bread or cookie)	6 months
Egg substitutes	7 days, if refrigerated after opening 12 months frozen
Fish, breaded	18 months
Fish, raw but headed and gutted	6 months
Frozen potato products (fries, hash browns, tater tots)	6-12 months
Fruits	4-6 months
Ice Cream	2-4 months
Ice pops	9 months
Juice concentrates	1-2 years
Pancakes, waffles	2 months
Sausages, precooked	1-2 months
Sausages, uncooked	1-2 months
Soy meat substitutes	12-18 months
TV dinners: pies, casseroles, shrimp, ham, pork, or sausage	3-4 months
TV dinners: beef, turkey, chicken, or fish	6 months
Vegetables	8 months

Tip: Keep food frozen. It will last much longer than if it is exposed to changing temperatures. Keep all frozen food at 0°F or below. Leave meat, poultry and seafood in the original packaging.

GRAINS, BEANS & PASTA



PANTRY STORED

PANTRY STORED AFTER OPENING

Beans, dried	1-2 years	1 year
Lentils, dried	1 year	1 year
Pasta, dry (without egg)	2 years	1 year
Pasta, dry (egg noodles)	2 years	1-2 months
Peas, dried split	1 year	1 year
Rice, brown		1 year
Rice, white or wild		6 months, if refrigerated after 1 year

**Did you
know?**

As a nonprofit organization, the Food Bank relies on the generosity of the community. Get involved at LAFoodBank.org



MEAT & FISH/SEAFOOD



REFRIGERATOR STORED

FROZEN

Beef: roasts, steaks	3-5 days	4-12 months
Pork: roasts, chops	3-5 days	4-12 months
Lamb: roasts, steaks/chops	3-5 days	4-12 months
Crab, canned	6 months unopened 5-7 days opened	Do not freeze
Crab, legs	3-5 days	9-12 months
Fatty fish (bluefish, catfish, mackerel, mullet, salmon, tuna, etc.)	1-2 days	2-3 months
Ground meats (beef, pork, lamb, or poultry)	1-2 days	3-4 months
Lean fish (cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, sole, etc.)	1-2 days	6-10 months
Lean fish (pollock, ocean perch, rockfish, sea trout)	1-2 days	4-8 months
Lobster tails, raw	4-5 days	6-9 months
Poultry: chicken or turkey, whole cuts	1-2 days	12 months
Shrimp, raw	2 days	9 months
Scallops, raw	1-2 days	3-6 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Chicken nuggets/patties		1-3 months
Chicken, fried or rotisserie	3-4 days	4 months

**Did you
know?**

Food waste releases methane gas which hurts our environment.



Meats should be completely frozen, and stored at 0°F or lower. Do **NOT** leave meats at room temperature unnecessarily!

Prepared foods should be kept refrigerated. These foods are perishable, and leaving them at room temperature will shorten their shelf life.

MEAT & FISH/SEAFOOD



REFRIGERATOR STORED

FROZEN

Ham	1 week	
Hot dogs	2 weeks, 1 week, if refrigerated after opening	1-2 months
Sausage, hard/dry/sliced (pepperoni)	2-3 weeks	1-2 months
Sausage, raw bulk type or patties	1-2 days	1-2 months
Sausage, fully cooked smoked links/kielbasa	1 week	1-2 months

SHELF STABLE FOODS



PANTRY STORED

PANTRY STORED AFTER OPENING

REFRIGERATED AFTER OPENING

Almond milk, shelf stable	1 month		
Applesauce, commercial	12-18 months	Not recommended	7-10 days
Bacon, fully cooked	6 months		5-14 days
Canned chicken	5 years		3-4 days
Cereal, cook before eating (oatmeal)	12 months	6-12 months	
Chocolate syrup	2 years	Not recommended	6 months
Coconut milk, shelf-stable	1 month		
Coffee creamer, liquid shelf-stable	9-12 months		
Crackers	8 months	1 month	3-4 months

SHELF STABLE FOODS



	PANTRY STORED	PANTRY STORED AFTER OPENING	REFRIGERATED AFTER OPENING
Fruits, dried	6 months	1 month	6 months
Ham, shelf-stable cans	6-9 months		5-14 days
Juice, shelf-stable bottles	9 months		
Milk, canned evaporated or condensed	12 months		4-5 days
Milk, shelf-stable UHT	6 months		
Meat products, canned	5 years		3-4 days
Nuts, jars or cans	1 year	2-9 months	4-6 months
Nutritional aid supplements (Boost, etc.)	1 year		
Peanut butter, commercial	6-24 months	2-3 months	
Popcorn, commercially popped in bags	2-3 months	1-2 weeks	
Popcorn, dry kernels in jar	2 years	1 year	
Popcorn, microwave packets	6-12 months	1-2 days	
Potato chips	Use-by date 2 months	1-2 weeks	
Potatoes, instant	10-15 months	6-12 months	
Powdered milk	2-10 years		
Pretzels	4-9 months	3 weeks	
Pudding mixes	1 year	3-4 months	
Soup mixes, dry bouillon	1 year	1 year	
Syrup	1 year		6 months
Toaster pastries	6-12 months	1-2 weeks	

BEVERAGES



	PANTRY STORED	REFRIGERATION AFTER OPENING	STORED FROZEN
Coffee, ground (non-vacuum)	3-5 months	3-5 months	1-2 years
Coffee, instant	1 year	2-3 months	3-4 months
Coffee, whole beans	3-5 months	3-5 months	8-12 days
Fruit juice in cartons, punch juice, boxes	3 weeks	7-12 days	8-12 days
Soda (carbonated cola drinks, mixers, diet soda, bottles or cans)	Use-by date		2-3 days
Soy or rice beverages	18-36 months		
Tea, bags	2-3 years		
Tea, instant	2 years		
Tea, loose	Indefinitely		

Did you know?

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank provides food to children during the summer who rely on school meals. Learn more at LAFoodBank.org/summer-meals.



LOS ANGELES REGIONAL



Fighting Hunger. Giving Hope.

Disclaimer: This Shelf Life Guide information is reliable, however, please remember that individual foods will vary and that this advice should only be taken as a guideline and not a replacement for your healthcare professional. If you have any additional questions, please contact the Child and Nutrition Department at (323) 234-3030 or nutritioned@lafoodbank.org.

#WeFeedLA

Information courtesy of [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) | [FoodKeeper App](https://www.foodkeeperapp.com)