

NEWS ARTICLE

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WHEN TO THROW IT OUT

Spring is the time to give your home a thorough cleaning. Many of us will begin spring cleaning in the kitchen. Whether it is the pantry or the refrigerator, a good way to begin the cleaning process is to look at the dates on the food items. Food dates may be helpful in determining if the product is still good to eat, or needs to be tossed out. However, many of the dates can be confusing. Let's take a closer look at them.

Deciding what needs to go and what is still okay to eat can be confusing especially when it comes to certain foods like spices and canned foods. Dates printed on the containers can also be confusing. Some say "sell-by"; others say "best if used by". So the question arises, "It is safe to eat or does this mean it just may not be as fresh as we might want?" Here is some information to help you determine if the product can be used or if it is ready for the trash can.

- A "Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- A "Best if Used By (or Before)" date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- A "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 of the product.
- "Close or coded dates" are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

It is interesting to note that the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) does not generally require product dating on most items. Infant formula is the exception. Some states

do have requirements, others have none. However, even though it isn't required everywhere, many food manufacturers do put dates on their products.

The codes used are more for food quality, not food safety. Meats, including poultry, dairy, and eggs are the most vulnerable for food safety concerns. It is recommended to eat or cook and/or freeze these foods by the "use-by date".

Looking at the product and smelling the product is not a good indication of determining if the food is safe to eat. Many foodborne illnesses cannot be determined by sight or smell. Therefore, if you do not plan to eat the food before the "use-by" date, you should freeze it.

For eggs, always purchase them before the "sell-by" date on the carton. When you get home, refrigerate the eggs in the coldest part of the refrigerator (on a shelf towards the back), in the original container. Use the eggs within 3 to 5 weeks of when you purchased them.

What about canned food items and other non-perishable items? High-acid foods such as tomatoes will have the best quality if they are used within 12 to 18 months. Low-acid foods such as canned meat, fish, or vegetables will last up to 2 years. This only goes for canned foods which have been processed in a factory. It is recommended to use home canned food products within 1 year after processing.

Be sure to store your canned foods properly in a cool, clean, dry place. Use the first in, first out method when buying new canned foods to add to your pantry. For example, you purchase green beans because there is a sale on them. When you get home, you discover you have several other cans of green beans. Move those to the front of the pantry and use first before using the ones you just purchased. This is called the FIFO (first in, first out) method of rotating your food stock.

What about spices and herbs? According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics most dried herbs and spices will only keep for approximately one year. So, if you have spices in your pantry that have been there for longer than one year, you might want to toss them out. The one year date is for freshness and best quality.

You can also determine freshness and quality of spices and herbs by smell. Open the container. If it has a strong smell, then the quality is still there. If you have a hard time smelling the aroma, it is time to toss it into the garbage. Be sure to keep dried spices and herbs in a cool, dark, dry place.

For more information about determining freshness in products such as flour and sugar, contact the Howard County Cooperative Extension Service located on the second floor of the courthouse. You may also call our office at 870-845-7517. I will be glad to send you the fact sheet, “A Quick Guide to Food Safety” developed by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. There is also an app FoodKeeper from USDA that can help you decide what food you need to toss when cleaning out your pantry or refrigerator.

Recipe of the Week

This recipe was recently submitted by Adelene Westfall a member of the Teen Leaders 4-H Club. She entered this recipe in the 4-H Bread and Cookie Contest where she won 1st Place – Senior in the Yeast Breads Specialty Contest. It is delicious!

Buttery Garlic Knots

2 cups flour + 3 cups later

2 Tablespoons yeast

4 Tablespoons sugar

3 Tablespoons dry milk (opt.)

2 cups warm water

½ cup olive oil

1 tsp. salt

½ cup melted butter

Fresh parsley

1 Tablespoon garlic powder

In a bowl, mix 2 cups flour, yeast, sugar, 2 cups warm water and dry milk. Mix and cover for 10 minutes. After the 10 minutes, add the additional 3 cups flour, olive oil and salt. Knead dough for 10 minutes. Flour your surface and pat down the dough. Cut dough into strips and form into knots. Brush with egg wash. Bake at 350 degrees for 10-20 minutes. Stir together melted butter, garlic powder and parsley in a bowl. Brush the mixture on the tops of the bread knots.