

Nutrition News

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A COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

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Food Budgeting

Cleaning the Kitchen Pantry: Toss or Save?

Have you looked at the foods in your kitchen lately?

The following tips are for food stored at a room temperature of about 70 degrees. **READ LABELS CAREFULLY** — they contain storage information and “use by” dates.

Canned foods — 1 to 2 years. Many cans have a “for best quality use by” date. Avoid refrigerating **OPENED** canned foods in their can. Transfer to another storage container.

Spices and herbs — 1 year for herbs or ground spices, 2 years for whole spices. Air, light, moisture and heat speed flavor and color loss of herbs and spices. Store them in a tightly covered container in a dark place away from sunlight. Avoid storing above or near the stove, dishwasher, microwave, refrigerator, sink or a heating vent.

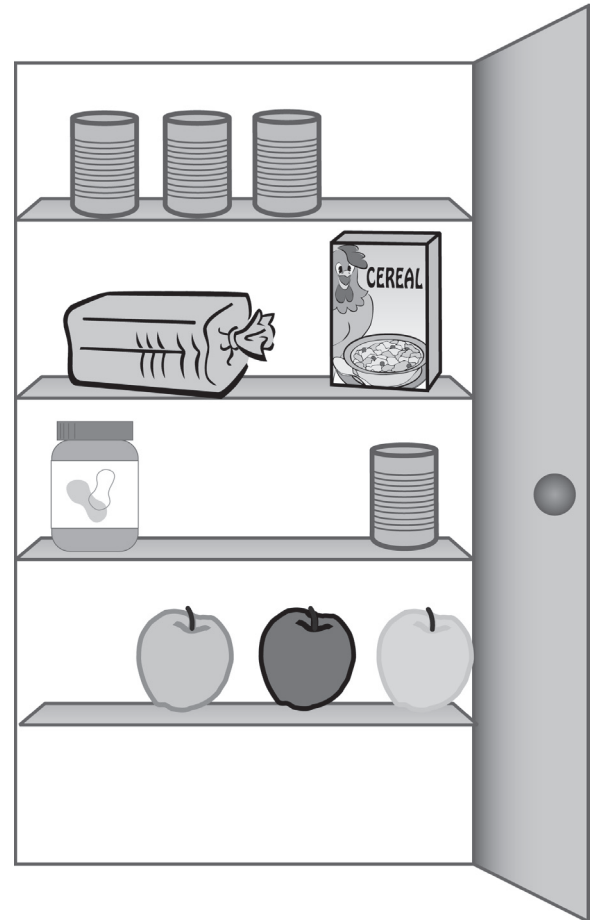
Always using a dry spoon to remove spices or herbs. Never sprinkling directly from the container into a steaming pot.

Refrigerate paprika, chili powder and red pepper to keep the color, especially in hotter climates.

To test spices for potency, conduct a “sniff test.” For ground spices, hold them up to your nose and smell. For whole spices — such as a cinnamon stick or nutmeg — break, crush or scrape them before smelling. For herbs, crush them in your hand and then sniff. Do **NOT** sniff pepper or chili powder because they can irritate your nose.

White flour — 6 to 12 months. Store flour in a cool, dry place. It's important to store in an airtight container or freezer bag to preserve the flour's moisture content.

For longer storage, keep white flours in the refrigerator in an airtight container. All-purpose and bread flour will keep up to two years at 40 degrees in your refrigerator or indefinitely in the freezer.



If measuring flour from refrigerated or frozen flour, allow it to come to room temperature before using it in baked goods.

Whole-wheat flour — 1 to 3 months at room temperature, up to 6 months if refrigerated, up to 12 months if frozen. Store it in an airtight container or freezer bag. If the flour is left at room temperature, the ground wheat germ, which contains oil, can become rancid.

Honey — 12 months. Honey stores best at room temperature. If stored in the refrigerator, it tends to crystallize more rapidly, a natural process in which its liquid turns solid.

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Revitalizing crystallized honey by placing the jar in warm water and stirring until the crystals dissolve.

Brown sugar — 4 to 6 months for maximum flavor. Store brown sugar in an airtight container to retain moisture and prevent hardening.

White granulated sugar — 2 years. Store sugar in an airtight container or a heavy moisture-proof plastic bag, such as a freezer bag. Properly stored sugar keeps indefinitely.

When white granulated sugar absorbs moisture, it becomes hard. To break it up, place it in a sturdy food-quality bag and pound it with a hammer, meat pounder or flat side of a meat mallet.

Vegetable oil — 1 to 6 months opened, 6 to 12 months unopened. Some oils are good 1 year opened and 2 years unopened. For oils with a shorter storage time (walnut, sesame, hazelnut, almond) refrigerate after opening. Olive oil may become cloudy in the refrigerator but usually clears at room temperature.

If transferring it to a separate container, put it 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.

Vinegar — 1 year opened, 2 years unopened (manufacturers' recommendations vary). Keep vinegar tightly covered. White vinegar will maintain unchanged longer than other types of vinegar. The storage life of vinegar is "almost indefinite" because of its acidic nature.

Final Kitchen Tips

- If you tossed portions of expired foods, buy a smaller container next time.
- Keep a permanent marker pen in your kitchen and put the date – month and YEAR you purchased the food – on the container.
- Practice "first in, first out," or what professionals refer to as FIFO, for foods.

Sources: University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension and Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department

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To find out more, contact your parish agent.