

Taking Stock of your Pantry and Freezer  
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Over the last several months there has been a great deal of focus on stocking up food and supplies to last during the COVID-19 crisis. This is a good time to give some guidelines on how long all the food will safely last in our cupboards and freezers.

Refrigerate perishable foods within two hours; within one hour if it is above 90°. Set your refrigerator to 40° and your freezer to 0°; check the temperature using a thermometer. Your food stored in the freezer can lose quality due to enzymes, air, ice crystals and moisture. Try to minimize as much air from packaging as possible to prevent food from browning. Also, keeping the temperature at zero or below will help to prevent the formation of ice crystals. One thing I have found helpful is to rotate freezer items. We have a deep freezer so a lot of food can easily get lost in there. When I come home from the grocery store, I label anything that doesn't already have a date on it and move older items to the front and newer items to the back.

Here is a chart of perishable foods from the USDA.

Cold Storage Chart

|                                 |                                 | Refrigerate 40° | Freeze 0°        |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| <b>Meat</b>                     | <b>Description</b>              |                 |                  |               |
| Fresh beef, pork, lamb, veal    | Ground hamburger, stew meat     | 1-2 days        | 3-4 months       |               |
|                                 | Chops, roasts, steaks           | 3-5 days        | 4-12 months      |               |
|                                 | corned beef in pouch with juice | 5-7 days        | drained, 1 month |               |
|                                 | Bacon                           | 7 days          | 1 month          |               |
| Ham                             | Slices                          | 3-4 days        | 1-2 months       |               |
|                                 | Half                            | 3-5 days        | 1-2 months       |               |
|                                 | Whole                           | 7 days          | 1-2 months       |               |
| <b>Chicken, Turkey, Poultry</b> |                                 |                 |                  |               |
| Fresh                           | Pieces                          | 1-2 days        | 9 months         |               |
|                                 | Whole                           | 1-2 days        | 1 year           |               |
| <b>Eggs</b>                     |                                 |                 |                  |               |
|                                 | Fresh                           | In Shell        | 3-5 weeks        | Do not freeze |
|                                 |                                 | yolk or whites  | 2-4 days         | 1 year        |
|                                 |                                 |                 |                  |               |
| Mayonnaise                      | Refrigerate after opening       | 2 months        | Do not freeze    |               |
| Lunch meat/Deli meat            | Deli sliced or store prepared   | 3-5 days        | 1-2 months       |               |

For more information go to <https://usda.gov> and search for Keep Foods Safe.

I don't know if you are anything like me but I can get a bit, well let's just say "distracted." I have the best of intentions when I buy that special cut of meat or unique condiment, but then never use it. What's worse is when I discover it months later and wonder "is it still good"? Well, here are a few guidelines on safe food storage periods and hopefully some helpful tips.

"Best by" and "use by" dates are generally found on shelf stable products such as condiments. They tell you how long the product is likely to remain at its absolute best quality when

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unopened. You can safely consume these products after their date but may notice some degradation in quality.

“Sell by dates” are found on perishable items like milk, meat, and seafood. They are used as a guide so stores know how long to safely display them. If they have been stored properly they can be consumed after this date, see guide <https://extension.wsu.edu/foodsafety/content/decoding-food-dates/>.

Store home canned foods in a cool, dark, dry place between 50-70 degrees. Remove jar rings 12-24 hours after canning. Wipe jars and do not stack, that way if there is a break in the seal you will see it. I like to put my jars in the original boxes so I can easily store them on storage racks in my pantry. I also label jars at this point so I know when I made it and what it is. Following these guidelines, home preserved food will have its best quality safely maintained for one year. After that it is still safe to eat but you may find that there may be loss of quality.

In response to California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, UCCE Central Sierra is not offering in-person Master Food Preserver public classes until public health guidelines change.

We realize county residents value our public classes. We appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. .

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at [edmf@ucanr.edu](mailto:edmf@ucanr.edu). For more information about our program and events, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmf>. Sign up to receive our ENewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!