

Safe Food Storage: The Refrigerator and Freezer

For best results, use packaging designed for refrigerator/freezer storage. This extends shelf life and protects food from damage, contamination, and deterioration.

- Use foil, plastic wrap, plastic bags, or airtight containers designed for refrigerating or freezing food. Moisture- and vapor-proof materials are best.
- Clean your refrigerator regularly to reduce food odors and cross contamination. Remove spoiled foods immediately so decay cannot pass to other foods.
- Refrigerator temperature between 34 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit is best. Perishable foods stored at temperatures above 40°F spoil rapidly and may allow pathogen growth. Check temperatures with a refrigerator thermometer.
- Keep your freezer clean and at 0°F or lower.
- Use foods quickly. Don't depend on maximum storage time. Label and date the package for easy identification.

BREADS, PASTRIES, AND CAKES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Unbaked yeast dough, rolls, and bread	2-3 days	1 month	Longer storage causes yeast to become inactivated, and the gluten weakens.
Partially baked cinnamon rolls		6-8 months	
Baked quick breads, muffins		2-3 months	
Baked breads without preservatives	1-2 weeks	3-5 months	Refrigeration is recommended to prevent mold growth, but it will increase staling due to moisture reduction.
Unfrosted doughnuts		2-4 weeks	
Waffles		1-2 months	
Unbaked fruit pies	1-2 days	2-4 months	
Baked fruit pies	2-3 days	3-4 months	
Pumpkin or chiffon pies	2-3 days	1-2 months	
Cookies, baked, unbaked		6-12 months	Most cookies can be stored at room temperature 2-3 weeks. Refrigerate high moisture cookies (i.e. custard-type bar cookies)
Freezer pie shells		12 months (unopened) 2 months (opened)	
Unbaked cakes (batter)		1 month	Use double-acting baking powder for best results.
Frosted baked cakes		1 month	
Unfrosted baked cakes		6 months	
Foam cakes (i.e. Angel Food)		4-6 months	
Fruit cakes		6-12 months	
Refrigerated biscuits, rolls, pastries, cookie dough	Expiration date on package label	Do not freeze	Store in refrigerator for best storage life.

DAIRY PRODUCTS – REAL AND SUBSTITUTES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Butter	1-2 months	6-9 months	Wrap or cover tightly.
Margarine	4-6 months	12 months	Wrap or cover tightly.
Buttermilk	1-2 weeks	3 months	Cover tightly. Remix before using. Check date on carton.
Cheese Cottage, ricotta Cream, Neufchatel Hard and wax-coated in large pieces; Cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Swiss, Brick Processed, sliced Soft cream cheese Parmesan, Romano Shredded cheese	1-2 weeks 2 weeks 2-3 months, unopened 2-3 weeks, opened 3-4 weeks 5-6 days, opened 6 months 3-4 weeks	Do not freeze Do not freeze 6-8 months 6 months 3-4 months	Keep all cheese tightly packaged in moisture-resistant wrap. If outside of hard cheese gets moldy, cut away ½-1 inch around the mold. Discard cheese with heavy mold. Many cheeses can be frozen but will become crumbly. Refer to “best when purchased by” dates for best quality. Refrigerate slices of processed cheese as well as loaves and jars of processed cheese and cheese food after opening. Refrigerate loaves and jars after opening. Most squeeze packages and aerosol cans don’t need refrigeration, but check the label. Keep shredded cheese refrigerated. Always be aware of “best if used by” or “sell by” dates.
Dips Commercial Homemade	2 weeks 2 days		Keep tightly covered.
Milk Fresh homogenized or reconstituted nonfat, dry Evaporated (opened) Reconstituted evaporated milk Sweetened, condensed (opened) Non-dairy milk	Use-by date 4-5 days 3-5 days 4-5 days 7-10 days	3 months	Store in covered or capped containers. To help prevent spoilage, don’t return unused milk to original containers. Follow “sell by” date on containers for best quality and safety.
Sour cream	Use-by date	Freezing not recommended	Keep covered.
Whipped topping Aerosol can Prepared from mix Frozen, premade	3-4 weeks 3 days 2-3 weeks	Freezing not recommended 14 months	Keep covered. May be refrozen four to five times if thawed in the refrigerator.
Yogurt	7-10 days	1-2 months	Keep covered and refrigerated. Follow the “use by” date on the package, or up to two weeks after the “sell by” date. Yogurt may separate when frozen.

FRUITS AND JUICES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Apples	1 month	8-12 months	Discard bruised or decayed fruit. Don’t wash before storing to prevent spoilage. Store in the crisper drawer or moisture-resistant bag or wrap.
Apricots	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Avocados	5 days		

FRUITS AND JUICES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Bananas	3 days	2-3 months	Refrigerate or freeze only when fully ripe. Skin will darken.
Berries	2-3 days	8-12 months	
Canned fruits	2-4 days (opened)	2-3 months	
Cherries	2-3 days	8-12 months	
Citrus fruit	2 weeks	4-6 months	
Cranberries	2 months	8-12 months	
Guavas	1-2 days	8-12 months	
Juices – canned, bottled, or reconstituted			Thaw in the refrigerator. Keep fruit juice tightly covered. Do not store in cans after opening. Keep refrigerated. Do not use after the “use by” date on the package.
Pre-mixed, full-strength fruit juice	6 days (diluted)	8 months	
Real lemon juice	2 months		
Kiwis	6-8 days	4-6 months	
Mangos	1 week	6-8 months	
Melons	5 days	1 month	Wrap uncut cantaloupe and honeydew to prevent odor from spreading to other foods.
Nectarines	5 days	8-12 months	
Papayas	1 week	6-8 months	
Peaches	5 days	8-12 months	
Pears	5 days	8-12 months	
Pineapples	5-7 days	10-12 months	
Plantains	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Plums	5 days	8-12 months	
Rhubarb	1 week	8-12 months	
Frozen juice			
Concentrate	Do not refrigerate	12 months	
Reconstituted	6 days	6-12 months	

FRESH VEGETABLES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Artichokes	1-2 weeks		Freezes poorly
Asparagus	3-4 days	8-12 months	
Beans – green or wax	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Beets	2 weeks	8-12 months	
Broccoli	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Brussels sprouts	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Cabbage	1-2 weeks	8-12 months	Keep in crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
Canned vegetables	1-4 days (opened)	2-3 months	
Carrots	2 weeks	8-12 months	
Cauliflower	1 week	8-12 months	
Celery	1-2 weeks	8-12 months	
Corn, in husks	1-2 days	8-12 months	Keep moist
Cucumbers	1 week		
Eggplant	4-7 days	8-12 months	

FRESH VEGETABLES

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Frozen vegetables	Do not refrigerate	10-18 months	Once prepared, store covered in the refrigerator up to two days.
Greens	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Kohlrabi	1 week	8-12 months	
Lettuce, head Unwashed Washed, thoroughly	5-7 days 3-5 days		Store in moisture-resistant wrap, bag or lettuce keeper. Wrap and store away from other drained fruits and vegetables to prevent rusted spotting.
Lima beans	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Mushrooms	3-7 days	8-12 months	Do not wash before storing.
Onions, cut	3-5 days	8-12 months	Freezing causes mushy texture
Okra	3-5 days	8-12 months	
Parsley	2-3 days	3-4 months	
Peas Shelled Unshelled	3-5 days 3-5 days	8-12 months	Keep in the crisper or moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
Peppers	1 week	8-12 months	
Potatoes, white, sweet, cooked	3-4 days	1-2 months	Whole, uncut potatoes are best stored at room temperature.
Radishes	2 weeks		Freeze poorly.
Shredded cabbage, leaf and bibb lettuce, salad greens	1-2 days		Keep in moisture-resistant wrap or bag.
Squash Summer Winter	3-5 days Store in a dry place	8-12 months 8-12 months	
Tomatillos	1 week	8-12 months	
Tomatoes (ripe)	1-2 days	8-12 months	Ripen tomatoes at room temperature away from direct sunlight; refrigerate cut tomatoes

FRESH UNCOOKED MEAT AND POULTRY

Refrigerate fresh meat and poultry in the original wrapping from the store. To freeze, place the packaged meat in another freezer-safe container for better quality. Do not wash meat and poultry before preparation to prevent cross contamination.

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Red Meats Steaks, roast, chops, stew meat Ground meat Variety meats (liver, heart, etc.)	3-5 days 1-2 days 1-2 days	4-12 months 3-4 months 1-2 months	
Poultry Chicken or turkey, whole Chicken or turkey, pieces Duck or goose, whole Giblets, fresh Ground	1-2 days 1-2 days 1-2 days 1-2 days 1-2 days	1 year 9 months 6 months 6 months 3-4 months	

COOKED MEAT AND POULTRY

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Meat leftovers Cooked meat and meat dishes Gravy and meat broth	3-4 days 1-2 days	2-3 months 2-3 months	Keep covered. Keep covered.
Poultry, leftovers Rotisserie, Fried, Leftover chicken Cooked poultry dishes Pieces, plain Chicken nuggets, patties Cooked pieces covered with broth, gravy	3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days 3-4 days	4 months 4-6 months 1 month 1-3 months 6 months	Separate meat and liquids and place in shallow containers for quick cooling.

FISH AND SHELLFISH

Refrigerate fresh fish and shellfish in the original wrapping from the store. To freeze, place the packaged fish and shellfish in another freezer-safe container for better quality. Do not wash fish and shellfish before preparation to prevent cross contamination.

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F <i>(Fresh: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated)</i>	Freezer at 0°F <i>(Purchased fresh and home frozen)</i>	Freezer at 0°F <i>(Purchased commercially frozen for freezer storage)</i>
Fish fillets/steaks – Lean Cod, flounder Haddock, halibut Pollock, ocean perch Sea trout, rockfish	36 hours 36 hours 36 hours 36 hours	6-8 months 6-8 months 4 months 4 months	10-12 months 10-12 months 8-9 months 8-9 months
Fish fillets/steaks – fatty Mullet, smelt Salmon (cleaned)	36 hours 36 hours		6-8 months 7-9 months
Shellfish Dungeness, snow crab Blue crabmeat (fresh) Blue crabmeat (pasteurized) Cocktail claws King crab Surimi seafoods Shrimp Oysters, shucked Clams, shucked Lobster, live Lobster, tail meat	5 days 5-7 days 60 days 5 days 7 days 2 weeks 4 days 4-7 days 5 days 1-2 days 4-5 days	6 months 4 months 4 months 9 months 9 months 5 months 6 months	6 months 12 months 10-12 months 9 months 8 months
Breaded seafoods Shrimp Scallops Fish sticks Portions		8 months 10 months	12 months 16 months 18 months 18 months
Smoked fish Herring Salmon, Whitefish	3-4 days 5-8 days	2 months 2 months	

CURED AND SMOKED MEATS

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Bacon	7 days	1 month	Keep wrapped. Store in coldest part of refrigerator or in meat keeper. Times are for opened packages. Follow dates on packages.
Bologna, liverwurst	4-6 days		
Dried beef	10-12 days		
Hotdogs and lunch meats Hotdogs, opened Hotdogs, unopened Lunch meats, opened Lunch meats, unopened Sausage, Bratwurst, fresh Smoked breakfast links, patties Hard sausage – pepperoni, jerky sticks	1 week 2 weeks 3-5 days 2 weeks 1-2 days 7 days 2-3 weeks	1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months	Freeze in freezer wrap.
Ham, corned beef Corned beef, in pouch with juices Ham, canned (unopened – label says keep refrigerated) Ham, fully cooked, whole Ham, fully cooked, half Ham, fully cooked, slices Liver sausage	5-7 days 6-9 months 7 days 3-5 days 3-4 days 4-6 days	1 month Do not freeze 1-2 months 1-2 months 1-2 months	Drained, wrapped Store ham in refrigerator unless label indicates refrigeration is not needed. Once canned ham is opened, use within 3 to 5 days.

BABY FOOD

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Liquids Expressed breast milk Formula	24 hours 2 days	3-6 months Not recommended	For shelf storage of unopened cans of formula, observe the “use by” dates printed on containers. For more information, see K-State Extension Feeding Our Youngest series at https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/feeding-our-youngest-series-packet_PK14.pdf
Solids (opened or freshly made) Strained fruits and vegetables Strained meats and eggs Meat/vegetable combinations Homemade baby foods	2-3 days 1 day 1-2 days 1-2 days	6-8 months 1-2 months 1-2 months 3-4 months	Observe the “use by” date for shelf storage of unopened jars. Check to see that the safety button in the lid is down. If the jar does not “pop” when opened or is not sealed safely, do not use. For more information, see K-State Extension Feeding Our Youngest series at https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/feeding-our-youngest-series-packet_PK14.pdf

WILD GAME

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F
	<i>(Thawed: Never frozen or previously frozen and home refrigerated)</i>	<i>(Purchased fresh and home frozen)</i>
Venison	3-5 days	3-4 months
Rabbit, squirrel	1-2 days	12 months
Wild duck, pheasant, goose (whole)	1-2 days	6 months

OTHER FOODS

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F	Comments
Canned Goods			Transfer food to glass or plastic containers after opening. Keep covered. Texture will be softer after freezing, but is acceptable in sauce, soups, or stews.
Puddings, custard (opened)	1-2 days	2-3 months	
Gravy and broth	2 days		
Meats	2-3 days		
Sauce, tomato-based	5 days	2-3 months	
Miscellaneous			Can be stored in cupboard.
Soups, stews	2-3 days	4-6 months	
Sandwiches	2-3 days	1 month	
Casseroles	1-2 days	2-4 months	
Leftover cooked food	3-4 days	3-4 months	
Ground spices	6 months	6-12 months	
Candies	Not necessary	6-12 months	
Fats, oils, salad dressings (opened)	1-3 months		
Mayonnaise (opened)	2-3 months		
TV dinners, frozen casseroles	2 days	3-4 months	
Deli or vacuum-packed products			Freezing not recommended for any of these products.
Store-prepared or homemade salads (egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni)	3-4 days		
Pre-stuffed pork and lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed with dressing	1 day		
Store-cooked convenience meals	3-4 days	2-3 months	
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks		

EGGS

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F
Raw eggs in shell, whole	3 to 5 weeks	Do not freeze. Instead, beat yolks and whites together; then freeze.
Raw egg whites, egg yolks	2 to 4 days	12 months
Raw egg accidentally frozen in shell	Use immediately after thawing.	Keep frozen; then refrigerate to thaw.
Hard-cooked eggs	1 week	Do not freeze.
Egg substitutes, liquid		
Unopened	7 days	Do not freeze.
Opened	3 days	Do not freeze.
Egg substitutes, frozen		
Unopened	After thawing, 3 days or refer to "Use-By" date.	12 months
Opened		Do not freeze.
Casseroles with eggs	After baking, 3-4 days	After baking, 2 to 3 months.

EGGS

Product	Refrigerator at 32-40°F	Freezer at 0°F
Eggnog Commercial Homemade	3 to 5 days 2 to 4 days	6 months Do not freeze.
Pies Pumpkin or pecan Custard and chiffon	3 to 4 days 3 to 4 days	After baking, 1-2 months. Do not freeze.
Quiche with filling	After baking, 3 to 5 days	After baking, 2-3 months.

What do packaging dates mean?

- “Sell by” means the store should sell the product by the printed date, but the consumer still can eat the product safely after that date.
- “Best if used by” does not mean the consumer should use the product by the date listed for safety reasons, but for best quality and flavor.
- “Use by” is the last date recommended for use at peak quality. You likely will see a marked deterioration in product quality (flavor, appearance, texture) after that date. – Note: Do not use infant formula and baby food after the “use by” date.
- “Closed or coded dates” are packing numbers used by the manufacturer. Food can be recalled, using these packaging numbers, if a problem occurs.

Sources:

So Easy to Preserve, 6th edition, University of Georgia Extension

USDA FoodKeeper App <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app>

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