



Food Safety & Nutrition

Cleaning Out the Kitchen Cupboard



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Have you looked in your cupboards lately? I mean really looked in them? Like in your refrigerator, items can get pushed back in the cupboards and you forget about them. It may be time to pull those things out and assess if they should be kept or tossed out. Below are some tips on what should be kept, what should be tossed and how you can store foods for longer life.

In general food that does not need refrigeration can maintain good quality when stored at room temperature at 70 degrees F or below. Most canned foods are safe as long as they stay dry and don't develop any bulges. Recommended storage times are designed to provide you with the best quality food product. After suggested storage time has expired the food starts to lose quality characteristics such as color, texture and flavor. It is also important to read labels for any instructions on special storage conditions, times or dates. Be sure to look for instructions to refrigerate after opening.

Canned Foods

The Canned Food Alliance recommends eating canned food within 2 years for best quality. You may also want to refer to the 'use by' date that you may find on some products.

If you do not use the entire product after opening a can, do not refrigerate the leftovers in the can. Food can develop an off-odor from the can once opened.

White Flour

White flour stored in a dry, cool place will keep for 6-12 months. Whole-wheat flour will only keep at room temperature 1-3 months. The oils found in the germ of whole-wheat flour will turn rancid at room temperature therefore not lasting as long as the white flours.

If you plan to store your flour longer, keep it in the refrigerator in an airtight container. All-purpose and bread flour will keep up to two years in the refrigerator and indefinitely in the freezer. Whole-wheat flour will keep for six months in the refrigerator and up to 12 months in the freezer.

If you keep your flour in the refrigerator or freezer, be sure to let the flour return to room temperature before using it. The coolness of the flour may affect its reaction with other ingredients and affect the outcome of the recipe.

To preserve the flour's moisture content, the flour should be stored in an airtight container or freezer bag. If the moisture content of the flour is reduced it could affect the outcome of a recipe. If you plan to purchase airtight containers for your flour, here are some ideas of what size to buy depending on how much flour you plan to store.

- 1 pound flour = about 4 cups
- 5 pounds flour = about 20 cups
- 10 pounds flour = about 40 cups

Sugar

White sugar will keep at room temperature for 2 years. If stored in an airtight container it could last indefinitely. Brown sugar will keep 4-6 months for maximum flavor. It is extremely important to store brown sugar in an airtight container to retain its moisture and prevent it from becoming hard. Either store it in its original bag tightly closed or transfer to an airtight container.

If white sugar becomes lumpy smashing it into smaller pieces using a meat mallet or hammer can soften it. Brown sugar can be softened in the microwave covered with a clean, white, wet paper towel for 30 seconds.

Vegetable Oil

In general vegetable oils will keep 1-6 months opened and 6-12 months unopened. Times vary based on the type of oil, and the method of processing. Some companies will say they will keep for up to 1 year. Walnut, sesame, hazelnut and almond oils have a shorter storage life than most other vegetable oils. Oils that have been stored too long will develop an undesirable taste and odor. It is recommended to smell oil that hasn't been used for a while. If it smells rancid, toss it out and start with some fresh.

Storing them in the refrigerator can prolong the life of oil. Olive oil and some other may become cloudy in the refrigerator, but usually will clear up after sitting at room temperature for a while.

Shortening

Shortening will keep 3-8 months opened and 8-12 months unopened. Shortening that has been stored too long will go rancid and develop a bad taste and odor.

Baking Soda and Baking Powder

Baking soda and baking powder stored tightly covered in a dry place will keep for 12-18 months or the expiration date on the container. If you are not sure if the baking powder is still good you can test it for freshness by mixing 1-teaspoon baking powder with 1/3-cup hot water. If it foams vigorously, it still has rising power.

To check for freshness of baking soda, measure 1-½ teaspoons into a small bowl. Add 1-tablespoon vinegar. If it fizzes then it is still fresh. If it doesn't fizz, use it as an odor catcher in the refrigerator or freezer.

Spices and Herbs

Ground spices will keep for 1 year and whole spices for 2 years. Spices should be kept away from the heat, light and humidity to prevent flavor and color loss. Avoid storing them above the stove, dishwasher, microwave, refrigerator, sink or a heating vent.

Now that you are about to go and sort, toss, move or repackage foods in the cupboards, you may also want to wipe out the cupboards well with a damp cloth. This will get all the crumbs, dust and any bug larvae that may be hanging around. Also be sure to go with a marking pen to date products, new storage containers to store foods in an airtight environment, and a system for using up foods before they get lost in the back of the cupboard again.

For more information or food safety questions contact the WSU Extension office at 360-397-6060.
