

Project Joseph

The FDA Does NOT Require Food Dates

The answer to questions about food dating and food dates are inconsistent possibly due to the fact that – **there are no rules!** That's right, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (**FDA**) **does NOT require manufacturers to place any dates on food products!** *"This information is entirely at the discretion of the manufacturer."* Furthermore, "with the exception of infant formula, the laws that the FDA administers **do not preclude the sale of an item that is past the expiration date** indicated on the label." To put it simply, here are some interesting facts you may not know about the "shelf life" (i.e. the best before date, use by date, sell by date, eat by date) on food:

- **Food Can Be Sold After Date Expires** – Stores are not legally required to remove food from the shelf once the expiration date has passed. The expiration dates are strictly "advisory" in nature and are left entirely to the discretion of the manufacturer, thus not truly indicative of an item's true Shelf Life.[1]
- **Food Dates Are Not Required By Law** – With the exception of infant formula and baby food, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require food companies to place dates on their food products. The only requirement is that the food is wholesome and fit for consumption.
- **Laws Vary By State** – States have varying food dating laws. For example, many states require that milk and other perishables be sold before the expiration date, while others do not.

Definitions of Popular Food Dates

- **Best Before Date** – The "Best Before Date" is, according to the manufacturer, the last date by which a product's flavor or quality is best, the optimal time of its shelf life for quality. As noted above, the product may still be enjoyed after the "best before date." Additionally the manufacturer may call this the "Best if Used By" date or the "Best By" date, which indicates that the quality of food might diminish after that date, but it is still good to eat and the shelf life is still active.
- **Use By Date** – The "Use By Date" is the last day that the manufacturer vouches for the product's quality. The use by date is the date the manufacturers recommend to use the product for "peak quality" in the food. So you may eat the food after the use by date, but it likely is not going to be at peak quality.
- **Sell By Date** – The "Sell By Date" on a product is the item's expiration date, the end of its shelf life at the store. This is the last date stores are supposed to display the product for sale, after the Sell By Date the stores should remove the product, the Shelf Life has expired. Although the food product may be used and enjoyed past this date, it is not recommended to purchase a product if the Sell By date has past.
- **Shelf Life** – The "Shelf Life" of food is used in reference to these common codes (Use by Date, Sell by Date, and Best Before Date). The Shelf Life depends on which code is used and the type of product in question. Please see the specific page for your product to determine the proper shelf life of food because the Shelf Life is different for each particular item!

Food Dates are NOT intended for Safety

The FDA allows manufacturers to stamp their product with a date in order to help the seller determine how long to keep the product on display and to help the purchaser use the product when it is of best quality. **The date is in no way intended to be a food safety date.** The only regulation is that if a manufacturer **chooses** to use a date on their product,

then the FDA allows either coded letters and numbers (“closed dating”) to be used on shelf-stable products or if a calendar date is chosen (“open dating”) then the FDA requires that it contain the month, day and year along with a phrase explaining the meaning of that date. This is the official FDA regulation, but many states (20+) do require dating on certain foods – but at the same time other states have no dating requirements at all.

Don't Throw Out Your Food!

All foods, except infant formula, have a life beyond their printed date, whatever the manufacturer has chosen to call the date. Read through the pages of your favorite foods here at Eat By Date so you can make informed decisions both at home and at the store. Don't be scared to purchase the reduced priced food simply because the date has passed, it will taste great and save you cash. Additionally, while it is best to use your groceries in a first in – first out matter, don't be bound to printed dates. The packaged food will last well beyond its best by date, use by date and sell by date, so learn to take advantage of the extra time with the *tips on what to do with foods about to expire* sections.

132 Pounds of Wasted Food Each Month

A new study by Reuters has found that, on average, Americans throw away 33 pounds of food each month, meaning that the average family of 4 produces **132 pounds of wasted food each month!** In terms finances, that is about \$160 a month going straight to the garbage. Additionally, this study found **40% of food harvested in America goes to the landfill.** While a good amount of this food has surely gone bad, we have no doubt that many Americans are throwing out perfectly good food simply because of the misconception on the printed date. We hope this article can help you reduce the waste, help the environment and start saving money. Please see our “Save Money and the Environment by Decreasing Food Waste” blog post to find more on this issue.

Search Our Shelf Life Guide – Find How Long Food Lasts PAST Its Printed Date

At EatByDate we provide you with a diverse and informative perspective on food shelf life, food safety, expiration dates, recipes, substitutions, food storage and more to find out the essential question – **how long does food really last?** With all types of food such as Oreos, Spices, Sports Drinks, Deli Meat and much much more! Use either the menu at the top of the page, our Home Page or the search box below to find answer your question on how long does food *really* last!

Storage Life Of Sealed Foods

The Soft Grains

Soft Grains have softer outer shells which don't protect the seed interior as well as hard shelled seeds and therefore won't store as long. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **8 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. They should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures.

The Hard Grains

The Hard Grains all store well because of their hard outer shell which is nature's near perfect container. Remove that container and the contents rapidly deteriorate. Wheat, probably nature's longest storing seed, has been known to be edible after scores of years when stored in a cool dry place. As a general rule for hard grains, hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **10-12 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. They should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures.

Beans

As beans age they lose their oils, resist water absorption and won't swell. Worst case, they must be ground to be used. Storing beans in nitrogen helps prolong the loss of these oils as does cool temperatures. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **8-10 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. They should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures.

Flours and Other Products

Made From Cracked/Ground Seed

After seeds are broken open their outer shells can no longer protect the seed contents and seed nutrients start to degrade. Don't try to store unprotected flours longer than a year. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **5 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. They should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures. Note: Granola is not a long storing food because of the nuts. They contain high concentrations of oil which go rancid over the short term. Expect granola to last about 6-9 months.

Pasta

Pasta will store longer than flour if kept dry. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **8 - 10 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. Pasta should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures.

Honey, Salt and Sugar

Honey, Salt and Sugar should keep indefinitely if stored free of moisture. Watch out for additives in the honey. It is possible to buy honey with water and sugar added. This honey generally doesn't crystallize like pure 100% honey does when stored for a long time. If there are additives, there is no saying how long it will last

Peanut Butter Powder

Peanut butter powder will not store as long as wheat flour. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life of **4-5 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. It should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures.

Brown and White Rice

Brown ,and white rice store very differently. Brown rice is only expected to store for 6 months under average conditions. This is because of the essential fatty acids in brown rice. These oils quickly go rancid as they oxidize. It will store much longer if refrigerated. White rice has the outer shell removed along with those fats. Because of this, **white rice** isn't nearly as good for you, but will store longer. Hermetically sealed in the absence of oxygen, plan on a storage life for white rice of **8-10 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. It should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures. Stored in the absence of oxygen, **brown rice** will last longer than if it was stored in air. Plan on **1 to 2 years**. It is very important to store brown rice as cool as possible, for if you can get the temperature down another ten degrees, it will double the storage life again.

White, wild, arborio, jasmine and basmati rice

White, wild, arborio, jasmine and basmati rice all have an indefinite shelf life, when kept free from contaminants. The exception: brown rice. Thanks to its higher oil content, it won't keep nearly as long. Keep it fresh: Store in a cool, dry area. Once opened, place rice in a sealed airtight container or place original package in a resealable heavy-duty freezer bag. For added protection, store rice in the refrigerator or freezer.

Garden Seed or Sprouting Seed

All viable seeds are hibernating tiny living plants that only need moisture and warmth to sprout. And much like a chick in an egg, all the nutrients this little life needs to spring into existence is contained within it's shell. Like boiling an egg, heating a seed will kill that little life within it. However, unlike an egg, a seed can withstand cold temperatures. As seeds usually remain edible after the life within it dies, we must use different criteria when determining sproutable seed storage

life. And again the big deciding factor is temperature. The big seed companies freeze their seed between seasons to promote long life. Of course, you can also do the same thing. Plan on a storage life of **4 years** at a stable temperature of 70 degrees F. They should keep proportionately longer if stored at cooler temperatures. And remember, you want to store all of these seeds in air. Packed in nitrogen, the viability of some seeds will last longer than others. This is still to a large degree an unexplored science, and therefore we recommend you store all the seeds you plan on sprouting in air.

Alfalfa is a unique seed as it actually germinates better if the seed is **2 or 3 years** old. Most any sample of alfalfa contains 'hard' seed and 'soft' seed. Soft seed germinates within two days while hard seed germinates in about a week. The problem is, by the time the soft seed sprouts are ready to harvest, the hard seed may not have germinated yet. As storage time draws on, the hard seed turns into soft seed. Older seed germinates closer together. Stored in cool conditions, alfalfa seed should have a good percentage of germination up until it is **8 years** old

SALT

From the basic table variety to fancier versions like kosher and sea, salt is a flavor enhancer that never spoils or goes stale. Keep it fresh: Store in cool, dry area.

CORNSTARCH

A must-have for thickening sauces, gravies, and puddings. Cornstarch will keep indefinitely if it's kept dry and free from contaminants. Keep it fresh: Store in cool, dry area; keep package tightly closed between uses.

DISTILLED WHITE VINEGAR

A reliable standby in everything from marinades to salad dressings, distilled white vinegar will remain virtually unchanged as the years pass by.

Keep it fresh: Store vinegar a cool, dark area and keep tightly capped after each use.

HONEY

Pure honey is as durable as it is delicious; it keeps safe indefinitely. Honey may change color or crystallize over time, but that won't make it unsafe. Keep it fresh: Store in a cool area and keep tightly closed. Revive crystallized honey by placing the opened jar in warm water and stirring until dissolved.

SUGAR

White, brown or powdered — sugar never spoils because it doesn't support bacterial growth. The real challenge is to prevent it from becoming rock-hard. Keep it fresh: Keep sugar in a cool, dry area. To prevent sugar from hardening after opening, place it in an airtight container or cover the original package in a heavy-duty plastic bag and seal tightly.

MAPLE SYRUP

Pure maple syrup not only makes your pancakes special, it adds tremendous flavor to a whole range of dishes. Best of all, it keeps forever in the freezer. Keep it fresh: Refrigerate after opening. For long-term storage, freeze maple syrup in airtight plastic containers.

PURE VANILLA EXTRACT

Yes, it's more expensive than its imitation counterpart. But pure vanilla extract keeps forever, so you'll never have to waste a drop. Keep it fresh: Store in cool, dark cupboard and keep tightly closed when not in use.