Sorting 101

A guide to safe food sorting

This guide is used as a reference for volunteers and partners to determine what to keep and what to throw out when sorting canned food items and produce according to both product dates and quality in packaging.
Food Quality

How a food bank works

Donations
Food comes from:
- Community Food Drives
- Food Retailers
- Grower Producers
- Manufacturers

Houston Food Bank
Food is:
- Weighed
- Inspected
- Sorted
- Packed

Partner Location
Food is:
- Received
- Displayed

Partner Location Visitors
Food is:
- Selected

Partner Food

Produce may look different
Cans may be dented
Dates may have passed
Exterior packaging may be taped

Best Before 02-20-18

Three ways products are dated:

“Sell by” tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.

“Best if used by (or before)” is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

“Use by” the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality. The manufacturer of the product has determined the date.

In general, most canned foods have a long shelf life, and when properly stored, can be eaten for several years. Cereal can be good for up to 3 months past “Best if Used By” date.

Please use your best judgment as well. If something seems questionable, don’t consume.

Questions? Call 832-369-9390

For more information: houstonfoodbank.org/foodquality
确保防篡改密封条完好无损

- 剔除：如果密封条被刺穿，未粘附在容器边缘，或有视觉证据表明产品受污染。

- 查看：塑料或金属瓶盖上附有小链环，环绕瓶盖。如果这些链环断裂，应舍弃物品。

- 检查：如果瓶子的收缩膜完全破损，应舍弃物品。如果密封条轻微损坏但未显示任何篡改迹象，可保留产品。

- 检查：纸封条可能粘在瓶盖和瓶颈上。如果纸封条撕裂，应舍弃物品。
## Cans

Look for these red flag indicators of a “bad can”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>Image 2</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Dispose of cans with sharp dents on the squeezed lid seams, if the dent extends below the lid’s seam and into the side of the can, or if the dent peels back the lid seam or bottom. Accept cans with a long and flat dent on a seam, unless the dent is tipped inward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Dispose of cans with dents that cause sharp corners or sharp creases. If a fingernail applied to the edge of the crease can suspend the can, discard it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Discard cans with side dents causing points at the ends of the crease and cans that when the crease is so deep it also deforms an end of the can, causing it to wobble. Also dispose of severely crushed cans with the sides folded in on itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image8.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Dispose of swollen cans. You can detect a slight amount of swelling by pressing on the end. If the end can be pushed in, contamination is present. Discard even if the end springs back after it is released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image9.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image10.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Rust that remains after wiping may indicate rust pitting that is deep enough to allow contamination. Discard the can.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Glass & Plastic**

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A “GOOD” JAR**

Check for a vacuum that makes the jar airtight. An inward dished lid (usually marked with a printed pop-up indicator) shows the jar has a vacuum and is airtight.

If a container is not vacuum-sealed, a screw-cap and seal protect the contents from tampering and physical contamination. Discard the item if there is visual evidence of contamination or if the seal is broken.

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A “BAD” JAR**

Discard jars with a raised center that may or may not spring back after being depressed. Note: An item may have both a pop-up seal indicator and a tamper-proof band. If the band is broken and the pop-up seal is intact, the item is acceptable.

Discard glass jars with dents on the lids. This indicates that glass chips may be in the food.
WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A LABEL
The U.S. Fair Packaging and Labeling Act prohibits the distribution of any food item (except fresh fruit and vegetables) without a label. Labels shall contain:
• Common name of the product, for example, apple sauce
• Name and address of manufacturer, packer or distributor
• Quantity of the contents, for example, 10 oz.
• Common name of each ingredient, for example, salt or sugar

Many people are on restricted or specialized diets while others may be allergic to individual foods. The ingredients list helps them avoid products which may cause allergic reactions or are life threatening.

SAFE DISPOSAL OF UNSAFE PRODUCTS
HFB recommends that unsafe items should be disposed of in a lockable dumpster. If this is not available, open and pour out product or place in black trash bags to ensure the food is not available for consumption.
HFB receives meat donations from approved vendors. It is frozen at the donor’s location, safely transported to HFB’s warehouse, stored within our freezers, sorted in a temperature-controlled environment, and included in Agency Express for approved partners to order.

According to the USDA, food stored 0°F will always be safe. Only the quality suffers from lengthy freezer storage. Freezing keeps food safe by slowing the movement of molecules, causing microbes to enter a dormant stage. Freezing preserves food for extended periods because it prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause both food spoilage and foodborne illness.

HFB volunteers sort donated meat in a temperature-controlled environment. Meat is discarded if the packaging is torn or the meat is unfit for human consumption.
## OUT-OF-DATE PRODUCT GUIDELINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Best/use by date*</th>
<th>Exp. Date**</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEAT / PROTEIN</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen - Retail Pack</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Styrofoam Tray - Store Wrapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen - Commercial Pack - Whole</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Roasts, Turkeys, Hams, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen - Commercial Pack - Sliced/</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Deli Meats, Hamburgers, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned/Jar</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Peanut Butter, Canned Tuna, Ham, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRUITS / VEGETABLES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh</td>
<td>by inspection</td>
<td>by inspection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAIRY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Milk</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>Zero Days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese - Packaged Sliced /</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>Commercial Park - Retail Deli Donation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese - Packaged Block</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Refrigerated and by inspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Eggs</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BEVERAGES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Sport</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soda Diet</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soda Regular</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Beans</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bread</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>And by inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta-dried</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condiments</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>Mayonnaise, Ketchup, Dressings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Food</td>
<td>Do no distribute past Best/Use by date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formula</td>
<td>Do no distribute past Best/Use by date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If handled properly and kept at 40°F or below the product will still be safe, while some and of good quality until the dated date plus the time listed. For example, Whole frozen turkeys with a best/use by date of Jan 1st, 2012 are safe to distribute to clients until Jan 1st, 2013.

**“Best/use by date” is recommended for best flavor or quality and is determined by the manufacturer of the product.

**“Exp. Date” is when the product has lost peak quality.

Food Quality: things to know

Three ways products are dated

- “Sell-by” date - tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- “Best if Used By (or Before)” - recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
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In general, most canned foods have a long shelf life, and when properly stored, can be eaten for several years. Cereal can be good for up to 3 months past “Best if Used By” date.

Meat

- When frozen before expiration, some meat can be good for up to 12 months.
- Frozen meat can be a different color.

Packaging and Canned items

- Exterior packaging can be resealed/taped, as long as the interior packaging is intact.
- Canned items can be dented. No rust or pointed dents should be present. No dents around the seal.

Please read package labels for additional information.
And, please use your best judgment. If something seems questionable, do not consume.

Questions, call 832-369-9390 and see houstonfoodbank.org/foodquality

in partnership with houstonfoodbank
Houston Food Bank Food Storage Requirements

1. **Store food in a secure room, preventing the entry of bugs and rodents.** Check the walls, ceiling, shelf connections, and around windows and doors. Seal all gaps, holes, and cracks install a strip on the bottom of the pantry door to seal out bugs and rodents.

2. **Store all food on non-porous, easily sanitized surfaces.** Food may not be stored on bare wood, rusty metal, or shelf liner. Paint shelves with light colored, oil-based enamel paint. Re-painting may be needed once a year, depending on how much your pantry is used. The paint seals the wood or metal, and makes it easier to wash off during weekly cleaning.

3. **Store food properly.** Do not re-package any products except for rice and beans. Only use plastic zip-lock bags not paper bags. The use of pallets for food storage is not recommended; consider building a platform instead. Rice and beans may be kept in a tightly lidded ‘trash’ container on the platform. The bottom shelf or platform should be 6” off the floor, and food product may not be stored closer than 4” to the wall or 2” from the ceiling.

4. **Check incoming food to see that it is in good condition.** Discard bloated, dented, or rusty cans. Also discard containers that leak or do not have labels. **Expired or out-of-date baby food and formula must be discarded immediately.** Leave enough room on the shelves so that you can move product around for cleaning purposes. Use oldest product first.

5. **Store non-food items separately from food.** Never store non-food items above or mingled with food products. Some common non-food items are hazardous.

6. **Keep pantry clean.** All food storage areas should be checked and cleaned every time the pantry is used. Post specific cleaning tasks that are to be completed at the end of every shift. Floors and shelving can be sanitized with a solution of one teaspoon of bleach combined with a quart of water. Wipe out refrigerators/freezers as soon as spills occur. Use pest control materials that are safe to use around food.

7. **Store non-perishables at safe temperatures.** Food should be protected from extreme heat and humidity. Proper ventilation is between 75° and 80° Fahrenheit, which is the ideal range for non-perishable products.

8. **Store perishables at safe temperatures.** Keep temperature gauges in all refrigeration equipment. Using TDHS temperature chart, record the date and temperature of each unit once every other day, late Friday and early Monday, if there are no operations on the weekend. Safe temperatures in a refrigerator range from 34° to 40° Fahrenheit, in a freezer 0° Fahrenheit or less.

9. **All USDA grain products must be refrigerated from May through September to deter contamination by pest invasion.** Grain products such as flour or corn meal should be kept refrigerated during warmer months to deter the invasion of pests.

10. **Food and other products from HFB are for the clients of the approved program only.** The pantry, food storage area, refrigerators, and freezers containing product from HFB are to be kept locked and separated from all other agencies and programs.