

Here are some broad and basic food extension guidelines for common food categories*.

We use package dates as a source of information to help us decide how long we will distribute food.

Dates on packages are not always the best method for determining the quality of food - smell and sight is also valuable.

These are **helpful guidelines for any consumer, not just clients of food pantries.**

With an exception of infant formula, if the date passes during home storage, a product should still be safe and wholesome if handled properly until the time spoilage is evident. Spoiled foods will develop an off odor, flavor or texture due to naturally occurring spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such spoilage characteristics, it should not be eaten. For more information, visit www.fsis.usda.gov.

For questions, please contact Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin or the location where you received your food. SecondHarvestMadison.org

If it is not on this list, other recommended references are: UW Extension "Keep or Toss" (SecondHarvestMadison.org/KeepToss) or FMI FoodKeeper (SecondHarvestMadison.org/FoodKeeper)

*Please note that some manufacturers have requests for shorter distribution, e.g. Dannon requests consumption of their yogurt within 7 days past date.

DAIRY	CHEESE			EGGS	CREAM CHEESE, SOUR CREAM, YOGURT, COTTAGE CHEESE		
	MILK	Soft e.g. Brie, Goat, Ricotta	Medium Hardness e.g. Mozzarella, Muenster, Havarti, Shredded, Cheddar			Hard e.g. Aged Cheddar, Block Parmesan, Swiss	
	7 Days	14 Days	1 Month	6-12 Months	5 Weeks	14 Days	
PRODUCE	CUT FRUIT & VEGETABLES		BAGGED SALAD MIX/ GREENS	WHOLE PRODUCE		REFRIGERATED JUICE Pasteurized	
	4 Days		5 Days	Visual Inspection		7 Days	
PACKAGED	PREPARED FOODS e.g. Refrigerated Soups, Salsas, Guacamole, Chicken/Egg/Tuna Salad, Hummus		CANNED GOODS	BOXED GOODS	BABY FORMULA	BREADS, BAKERY	CAKES, SWEETS
	7 Days		2 Years	2 Years	No Extension	3 Weeks	7 Days
PROTEIN	DELI MEAT (FRESH)		TOFU (FRESH)	CHICKEN & TURKEY (FROZEN)			
	Factory Packaged	Deli Sliced		Whole	Parts	Ground	
	14 Days	5 Days	5 Weeks	12 Months	9 Months	3-4 Months	
	BEEF, LAMB, PORK, VEAL (FROZEN)						
	Steaks	Chops	Roasts	Variety, Organ Meat	Ground, Stew	Ham	
	4-12 Months	4-12 Months	4-12 Months	3-4 Months	3-4 Months	4-12 Months	
	FISH (FROZEN)						
Lean Fish e.g. Cod, Flounder, Haddock, Halibut, Pollock		Fatty Fish e.g. Bluefish, Salmon, Tuna		Shrimp/Scallops	Crab Legs	Smoked Fish	
4-12 Months		4-12 Months		4-12 Months	4-12 Months	3-4 Months	

FROZEN FOODS QUALITY, SAFETY, COLOR CHANGES

Freezer burn does not make food unsafe, merely dry in spots. It appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and is caused by air coming in contact with the surface of the food. Cut freezer-burned portions away either before or after cooking the food. Heavily freezer-burned foods may have to be discarded for quality reasons.

White dried patches indicate freezer burn. The meat is still safe to eat, but the freezer burned parts will be tough and tasteless and can be trimmed away if desired.

Freezer Storage Time

Because freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only. Refer to the freezer storage chart at the end of this document, which lists optimum freezing times for best quality. If a food is not listed on the chart, you may determine its quality after thawing. First check the odor. Some foods will develop a rancid or off odor when frozen too long and should be discarded.

Safe Thawing

Never thaw foods in a garage, basement, car, dishwasher or plastic garbage bag; out on the kitchen counter, outdoors or on the porch. These methods can leave your foods unsafe to eat. There are three safe ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. For faster thawing, place food in a leak proof plastic bag and immerse it in cold water. When microwave-defrosting food, plan to cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the food may become warm and begin to cook during microwaving.

Refreezing

Once food is thawed in the refrigerator, it is safe to refreeze it without cooking, although there may be a loss of quality due to the moisture lost through thawing.

COLOR CHANGES

MEAT

The bright red color of meat as purchased usually turns dark or pale brown depending on its variety. This may be due to lack of oxygen, freezer burn or abnormally long storage.

VEGETABLES

The dulling of color in frozen vegetables and cooked foods is usually the result of excessive drying due to improper packaging or over-lengthy storage.

POULTRY

Freezing doesn't usually cause color changes in poultry. However, the bones and the meat near them can become dark. Bone darkening results when pigment seeps through the porous bones of young poultry into the surrounding tissues when the poultry meat is frozen and thawed.

