

THE SHELF LIFE GUIDE



Help us prevent
food waste in
Los Angeles County.

*You might be throwing hundreds
of dollars' worth of food in the
trash! Save money and prevent
food waste by learning more
about shelf life.*

LOS ANGELES REGIONAL



Fighting Hunger. Giving Hope.

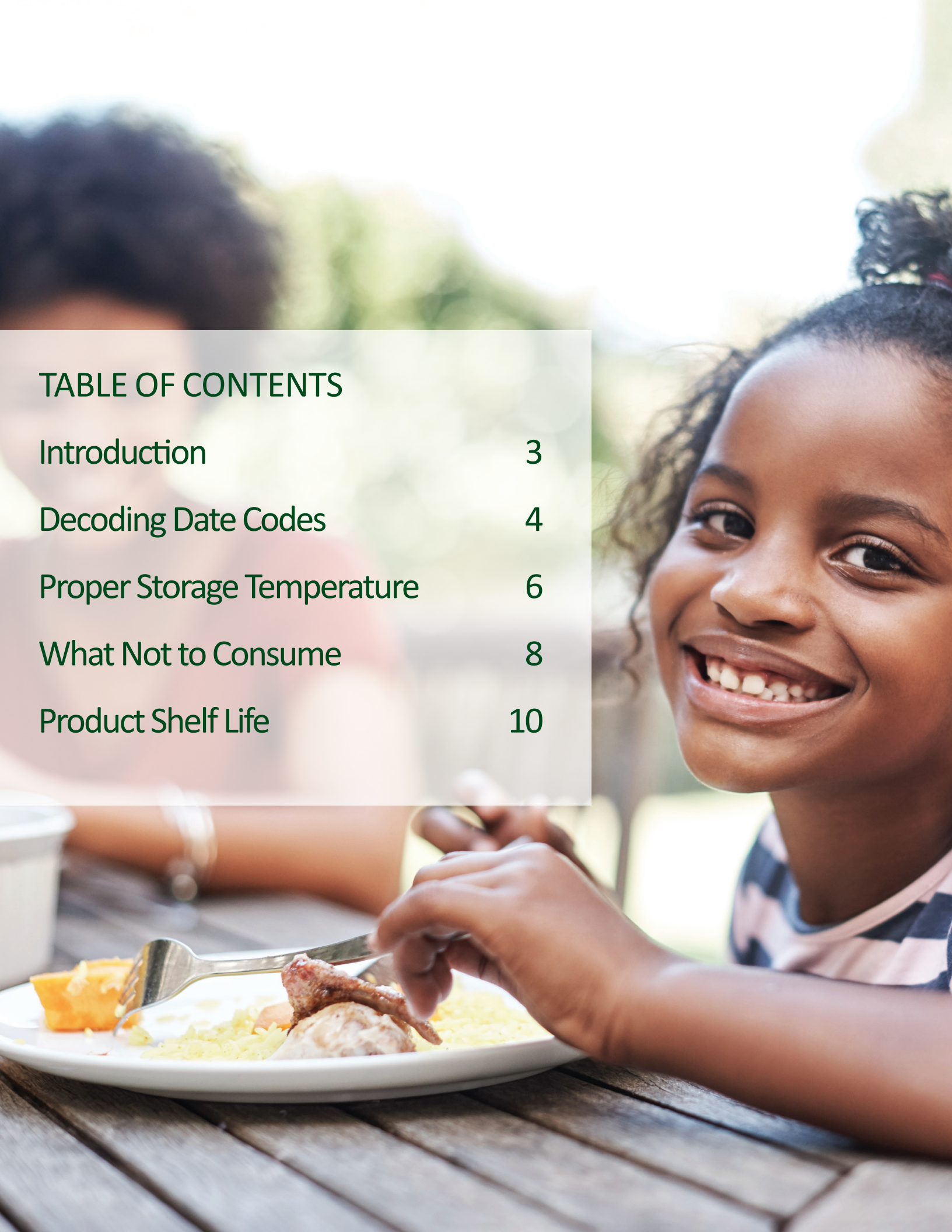


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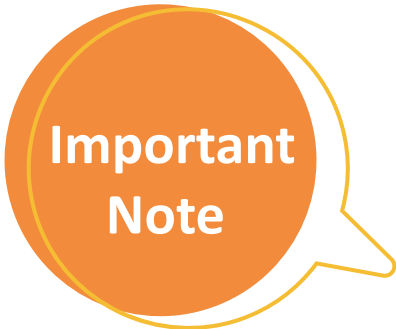
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Food insecurity in our community is not caused by scarcity. Millions of neighbors struggle while 30–40 percent of food goes to waste. By following this Shelf Life Guide, you can reduce waste, save money, and keep good food out of landfills.

Purchasing only what we need and utilizing our food efficiently reduces the amount of fresh and nutritious food going to waste. Unpurchased – but perfectly good – food can be donated by growers and grocers, then redirected to our neighbors in need.

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank’s primary goal is to provide nutritious food for our neighbors in need, but we know that the health of our community depends on the health of our overall environment, so the Food Bank also works to fight food waste. When food breaks down, it releases methane — a gas 86 times more powerful than carbon dioxide and a significant factor in global climate change. By following the tips in this Shelf Life Guide, you are making a positive impact on your community and your planet.

Thank you for your participation, and please share this Shelf Life Guide with your friends and family members. Anyone can download this guide for free at LAFoodBank.org/shelf-life.



With the exception of infant formula, product dating isn't mandated by Federal regulations. Manufacturers add dates to labels to indicate freshness, not food safety. Most foods remain safe and of good quality beyond these dates when stored properly. While meat, poultry, and egg products under the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) jurisdiction can bear voluntary dates, they must follow honest labeling guidelines. This guide offers advice on interpreting product dates and shelf life but should not be used to assess product safety.

DECODING DATE CODES



WHAT DO THE DATES ON FOOD PACKAGES MEAN?

Federal regulations require expiration dates solely for infant formula. Canned and boxed goods frequently stay consumable beyond these dates, while correct handling prolongs the freshness of refrigerated and frozen items. Frozen perishables remain safe indefinitely, but their quality may diminish over time. Here are typical food package code dates and their implications:

EXPIRATION DATE

FOUND ON	Baby food, formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder.	<code>EXPIRES MM/DD/YY</code> <code>DO NOT USE AFTER MM/DD/YY</code>
WHAT IT MEANS	Do NOT distribute or use after the expiration date! Yeast and baking powder work less well, but are safe to eat.	

SELL-BY DATE

FOUND ON	Refrigerated foods such as milk, yogurt, eggs, lunch meat.	<code>SELL BY DATE</code> <code>MM/DD/YY</code> <code>Pull Date</code>
WHAT IT MEANS	The store must sell these foods before the code date listed and often donates these foods when they are close to date. If the food has been handled properly, it is still safe to eat and the quality is good.	

PACK DATE

FOUND ON	Canned foods, crackers, cookies, and spices.	<code>Packed on MM/DD/YY</code> <code>22#5306412</code> <code>KL064</code>
WHAT IT MEANS	This is the date the food was packaged, often displayed in a numerical code. Usually, this food is of good quality and safe to eat for a long time past the date.	

USE-BY DATE

FOUND ON	Crackers, cookies, cold cereals and other dry, shelf-stable food.	<code>BEST IF USED BY DATE</code> <code>MM/DD/YY</code>
WHAT IT MEANS	The manufacturer’s recommendation for how long the food will be at peak quality. After this date, the food is still safe to eat but begins to lose nutrients and quality.	



TIPS ON STORING FRESH PRODUCE

Most fruits and vegetables keep the best quality when refrigerated. However, there are some exceptions.

Tomatoes taste best if not refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become grainy.

Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within one or two days. Refrigeration will cause the banana's skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.

If they are very fresh; apples, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) can be stored at room temperature, but these items should be refrigerated as they ripen.

Hardy vegetables like onions, garlic, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash can be stored in cool, dark places outside of the cooler.



Most fruits and vegetables keep the best quality when refrigerated. However, there are some exceptions.

DRY STORAGE

Temperature between 50° - 70°F.

Rotate stock so that older foods are distributed first.



REFRIGERATOR

Temperature should be between 32°F - 40°F.

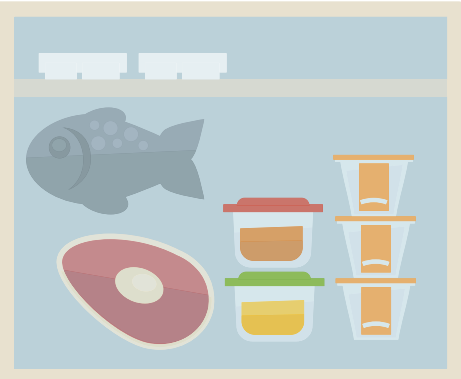
Set refrigerator air temperature at 39°F to maintain internal temperature of food at 41°F.

Leave space for air to circulate between items.

FREEZER

Temperature should be 0°F.

Freezer can be as cold as -20°F if you have something like ice cream present.



WHAT NOT TO CONSUME

TIPS ON STORING DRY GOODS

Store cans and boxes off the floor, and 18 inches away from the wall.

Store canned and boxed goods in a clean, dry and cool area (below 85°F).

Extremely hot (over 100°F) and cold (below 30°F) temperatures can damage canned goods and shorten shelf life.

Always rotate your stock. Use older products before newer ones.

Before
Opening

Shelf-stable foods should be safe unless the can or packaging has been damaged. After opening, store products in tightly closed containers. The storage of many shelf-stable items at room temperature is a quality issue - unless the product is contaminated. Some foods must be refrigerated after opening, such as meat or milk products.

CANS & JARS

Leaking or stained
Swollen can
Rusty
Badly dented, crimped or pinched
Container is cracked
Foul odor
Safety seals are broken or missing
Lids are loose or missing
Food exhibits changed color or odor—**never taste suspicious foods!**

DISCARD
WHEN

BOXES

Boxes with an inside bag:

Bag is torn or leaking
Bag has moldy or foreign objects inside
Bag seals are ripped

Boxes without an inside bag:

Box is open or torn
Box is stained or wet



PRODUCT SHELF LIFE



The following charts offer advice on the safe consumption of various foods beyond their labeled packaging dates:

CONDIMENTS & SAUCES 		
	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	REFRIGERATE AFTER OPENING
Barbecue sauce (bottled)	1 year	4 months
Jams, jellies and preserves	6-18 months	6-12 months
Ketchup, cocktail, or chili sauce	1 year	6 months
Mayonnaise, commercial	3-6 months	2 months
Mustard	1-2 years	1 year
Olives, black and green	12-18 months	2 weeks
Pickles	1 year	1-3 months
Salad dressing, commercial	10-12 months	1-3 months
Salsa, picante and taco sauces	1 year	1 month
Spaghetti sauce, in jars	18 months	4 days
Vinegar	2 years	
Worcestershire sauce	1 year	

Tip: When you open a package, write the date on it!

BABY FOOD

	AFTER OPENING	PANTRY TIPS
Cereal, dry mixes	1 month, if pantry stored	Should be discarded after use-by date
Formula, prepared	1 hour, if pantry stored 1 day, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date
Jars or pouches	2-3 days, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date
Liquid concentrate or ready-to-feed formula	2 days, if refrigerated	Should be discarded after use-by date

CANNED FOODS

	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	REFRIGERATE AFTER OPENING
Beans	2-5 years	3-4 days
Fish: salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel	2-5 years	3-4 days
Fruit	12-18 months	5-7 days
Juices	12-18 months	5-7 days
Meat: beef, chicken, pork, turkey	5 years	3-4 days
Soups	2-5 years	3-4 days
Tomato soup	12-18 months	5-7 days
Vegetables	2-5 years	3-4 days

BAKING & COOKING



	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	STORED IN PANTRY AFTER OPENING
Biscuit or Pancake mix	12 months	
Baking mixes (brownie, cake)	12-18 months	3-6 months pantry
Baking powder	6-18 months	6 months pantry
Baking soda	2-3 years	6 months
Cornmeal, regular	6-12 months	1 year
Cornmeal, stone ground or blue	1 month	2-4 months refrigerated
Flour, white	6-12 months	6-8 months refrigerated
Flour, whole wheat	3-6 months	6-8 months refrigerated
Frosting or icing	10-12 months	2-3 weeks refrigerated
Oils, olive or vegetable	6-12 months	3-4 months pantry
Pudding mixes (shelf-stable)	12 months	3-4 months pantry
Shortening, solid	12-18 months	6-12 months pantry
Spices, ground	2-3 years pantry	2-3 years pantry
Sugar substitutes	2-3 years	18-24 months pantry
Sugar (brown, confectioners, granulates)	6-22 months	18-24 month pantry

Did you
know?

The LA Regional Food Bank and Food Bank partners reach hundreds of thousands of people each month. Learn more at LAFoodBank.org/facts

BAKERY



	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	REFRIGERATED AFTER OPENING	STORED FROZEN
Commercial bread products (pan bread, flat bread, rolls, and buns)	14-18 days	2-3 weeks	3-5 months
Commerical cakes and muffins	3-7 days	7-10 days	6 months
Cookies, crispy	4-6 months		8-12 months
Cookies, soft	2-3 months		8-12 months
Corn tortillas	25-45 days	2-3 months	6-8 months
Flour tortillas	3 months	3 months	6 months
Pita bread	2-4 days	4-7 days	4 months
Pastries, danish	5-10 days	14 months	Do not freeze
Tortillas	3 months	3 months	6 months
Whole wheat tortillas	1 week	3-4 weeks	6-8 months



DAIRY PRODUCTS & EGGS



	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR	STORED IN FREEZER
Butter	1-2 months	6-9 months
Buttermilk	1-2 weeks	3 months
Cheese, hard (cheddar, Swiss, block parmesan)	6 months 3-4 weeks, if refrigerated after opening	6 months
Cheese, processed slices	3-4 weeks	
Cheese, shredded (cheddar, mozzarella, etc.)	1 month	3-4 months
Cheese, soft (brie, bel paese)	1-2 weeks	6 months
Coffee creamer, liquid refrigerated	3 weeks	
Cottage cheese, ricotta	2 weeks 1 week, if refrigerated after opening	
Cream cheese	2 weeks	
Cream, half-and-half	3-4 days	4 months
Cream, heavy	10 days	3-4 months
Cream, light	1 week	3-4 months
Egg substitutes, liquid	3 days	
Eggs, in shell	3-5 weeks if refrigerated after opening	
Margarine	6 months	12 months
Milk, plain or flavored	Package Use-By Date	3 months
Pudding	Package Use-By-Date	
Sour cream	Package Use-By-Date	
Whipped cream, aerosol can	3-4 weeks	
Whipped topping, aerosol can	3 months	
Whipped topping, tub	2 weeks	14 months
Yogurt	1-2 weeks	1-2 months

DELI & PREPARED FOODS



	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR	STORED IN FREEZER
Cooked pasta	3-5 days	1-2 months
Cooked rice	4-6 days	6 months
Fruit, cut	Package use-by date 4 days, if refrigerated after opening	
Guacamole	3-4 days	3-4 months
Hummus, commercial	3 months 7 days, if refrigerated after opening	
Hummus, traditional	7 days	
Leftovers, pizza	3-4 days	1-2 months
Leftovers (without meat, fish, poultry, or egg i.e. cooked vegetables, rice, or potatoes)	3-4 days	1-2 months
Leftovers (with meat, fish, poultry or egg)	3-4 days	2-3 months
Luncheon meat or poultry, pre-packaged	2 weeks 3-5 days, if refrigerated after opening	1-2 months
Luncheon meat or poultry, store-sliced	3-5 days	1-2 months
Main dishes or meals, hot or refrigerated	3-4 days	2-3 months
Meats, covered with gravy or broth	3-4 days	6 months
Salads (containing meat, fish, poultry or eggs)	3-4 days	
Salads, vegetable	3-5 days	
Soups, stews	3-4 days	2-3 months

Did you know?

Food waste is one of the single largest components in municipal landfills.



FOOD PURCHASED FROZEN



STORED IN FREEZER

Bread, bagels	3 months
Chicken, nuggets/patties	2 months
Desserts, frozen baked goods	3-4 months
Desserts, frozen cream pies	1-2 months
Desserts, frozen fruit pies	6-8 months
Dough, commercial (bread or cookie)	6 months
Egg substitutes	7 days, if refrigerated after opening 12 months frozen
Fish, breaded	18 months
Fish, raw but headed and gutted	6 months
Frozen potato products (fries, hash browns, tater tots)	6-12 months
Fruits	10-18 months
Ice cream	6 months
Ice pops	9 months
Juice concentrates	1-2 years
Pancakes, waffles	2 months
Sausages, precooked	1-2 months
Sausages, uncooked	1-2 months
Soy meat substitutes	12-18 months
TV dinners: pies, casseroles, shrimp, ham, pork, or sausage	3-4 months
TV dinners: beef, turkey, chicken, or fish	6 months
Vegetables	10-18 months

Tip: Keep food frozen. It will last much longer than if it is exposed to changing temperatures. Keep all frozen food at 0°F or below. Leave meat, poultry, and seafood in the original packaging.

GRAINS, BEANS & PASTA



STORED IN
PANTRY UNOPENED

STORED IN PANTRY
AFTER OPENING

Beans, dried	1-2 years	1 year
Lentils, dried	1 year	1 year
Pasta, dry (without egg)	2 years	1 year
Pasta, dry (egg noodles)	2 years	1-2 months
Peas, dried split	1 year	1 year
Rice, brown	1 year	1 year
Rice, white or wild	2 years	6 months, if refrigerated after 1 year

Did you
know?

As a nonprofit organization, the Food Bank relies on the generosity of the community. Get involved at [LAFoodBank.org](https://www.lafoodbank.org)



MEAT & FISH/SEAFOOD

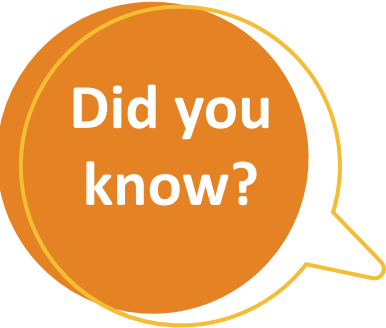


STORED IN REFRIGERATOR

STORED IN FREEZER

Beef: roasts, steaks	3-5 days	4-12 months
Pork: roasts, chops	3-5 days	4-12 months
Lamb: roasts, steaks/chops	3-5 days	4-12 months
Crab, canned	6 months unopened 5-7 days opened	Do not freeze
Crab, legs	3-5 days	9-12 months
Fatty fish (bluefish, catfish, mackerel, mullet, salmon, tuna, etc.)	1-2 days	2-3 months
Ground meats (beef, pork, lamb, or poultry)	1-2 days	3-4 months
Lean fish (cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, sole, etc.)	1-2 days	6-10 months
Lean fish (pollock, ocean perch, rockfish, sea trout)	1-2 days	4-8 months
Lobster tails, raw	4-5 days	6-9 months
Poultry: chicken or turkey, whole cuts	1-2 days	12 months
Shrimp, raw	2 days	9 months
Scallops, raw	1-2 days	3-6 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Chicken nuggets/patties		1-3 months
Chicken, fried or rotisserie	3-4 days	6-18 months

For meats and fish/seafood, it's best to follow the "use-by" or "freeze-by" date if provided. If the product is not consumed by the "use-by" date, it's recommended to freeze it for longer storage.



Food waste releases methane gas which hurts our environment.



Meats should be completely frozen, and stored at 0°F or lower. Do **NOT** leave meats at room temperature unnecessarily!

Prepared foods should be kept refrigerated. These foods are perishable, and leaving them at room temperature will shorten their shelf life.

MEAT & FISH/SEAFOOD



	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR	STORED IN FREEZER
Ham	1 week	
Hot dogs	2 weeks, 1 week, if refrigerated after opening	1-2 months
Sausage, hard/dry/sliced (pepperoni)	2-3 weeks	1-2 months
Sausage, raw bulk type or patties	1-2 days	1-2 months
Sausage, fully cooked smoked links/kielbasa	1 week	1-2 months

SHELF-STABLE FOODS



	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	STORED IN PANTRY AFTER OPENING	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR AFTER OPENING
Almond milk, shelf-stable	1 month		7-10 days
Applesauce, commercial	12-18 months	Not recommended	7-10 days
Bacon, fully cooked	6 months		5-14 days
Canned chicken	5 years		3-4 days
Cereal, cook before eating (oatmeal)	12 months	6-12 months	
Chocolate syrup	2 years	Not recommended	6 months
Coconut milk, shelf-stable	1 month		7-10 days
Coffee creamer, liquid shelf-stable	9-12 months		3 weeks
Crackers	8 months	1 month	3-4 months

SHELF-STABLE FOODS



	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	STORED IN PANTRY AFTER OPENING	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR AFTER OPENING
Fruits, dried	6 months	1 month	6 months
Ham, shelf-stable cans	6-9 months		5-14 days
Juice, shelf-stable bottles	3 weeks		8-12 days
Milk, canned evaporated or condensed	12 months		4-5 days
Milk, shelf-stable UHT	6-12 months		5-7 days
Meat products, canned	5 years		3-4 days
Nuts, jars or cans	1 year	2-9 months	4-6 months
Nutritional aid supplements (Boost, etc.)	1 year		
Peanut butter, commercial	6-24 months	2-3 months	
Popcorn, commercially popped in bags	2-3 months	1-2 weeks	
Popcorn, dry kernels in jar	2 years	1 year	
Popcorn, microwave packets	6-12 months	1-2 days	
Potato chips	Use-by date 2 months	1-2 weeks	
Potatoes, instant	10-15 months	6-12 months	
Powdered milk	3-5 years		3 months
Pretzels	4-9 months	3 weeks	
Pudding mixes	1 year	3-4 months	
Soup mixes, dry bouillon	1 year	1 year	
Syrup	1 year		6 months
Toaster pastries	6-12 months	1-2 weeks	

BEVERAGES



	STORED IN PANTRY UNOPENED	STORED IN REFRIGERATOR AFTER OPENING	STORED IN FREEZER
Coffee, ground (non-vacuum)	3-5 months	3-5 months	1-2 years
Coffee, instant	1 year	2-3 months	3-4 months
Coffee, whole beans	3-5 months	3-5 months	8-12 months
Fruit juice in cartons, punch juice, boxes	3 weeks	7-12 days	8-12 days
Soda (carbonated cola drinks, mixers, diet soda, bottles, or cans)	Use-by date		2-3 days
Soy or rice beverages	18-36 months	7-10 days	
Tea, bags	18-36 months		
Tea, instant	2 years		
Tea, loose	2 years		

Did you know?

The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank provides food to children during the summer who rely on school meals. Learn more at LAFoodBank.org/summer-meals.



LOS ANGELES REGIONAL



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Disclaimer: This Shelf Life Guide information is reliable, however, please remember that individual foods will vary and that this advice should only be taken as a guideline and not a replacement for your healthcare professional. If you have any additional questions, please contact the Child and Nutrition Department at (323) 234-3030 or nutritioned@lafoodbank.org.

#WeFeedLA

Information courtesy of [Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) | [FoodKeeper App](https://www.foodkeeperapp.com)