

Recommendations apply to foods in their original, unopened package. Always inspect products and discard if damaged or signs of spoilage appear.

A Food Safety Guide to Reducing Food Waste: Distributing and Using Shelf Stable Donated Products

Category	Product(s)	Distribution and Use Guidelines
Baby Food	Moist food	Do not distribute or use after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Use within 3 days once opened.
	Dry infant cereal	Do not distribute or use after package date. Store in a cool, dry location.
	Infant formula – wet or dry	Do not distribute or use after package date. Store in a sealed container. Keep liquid formula refrigerated.
Bakery Items	Breads, rolls, cakes, pastries, cookies	Distribute and use up to 3 weeks after package date. Sort carefully and discard if mold appears.
Canned Foods (includes trays and pouches)	Canned fruits, tomato products	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Discard damaged packages.*
	Canned meat, poultry, fish, soup, vegetables, and pasta	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Refrigerate after opening. Discard damaged packages.*
Cereals, Chips and Crackers	All types	Distribute and use up to 2 years after package date. Product may stale before then.
Condiments	Ketchup, mustard, mayo	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date. Discard if discolored or separation has occurred. Refrigerate after opening.
Cream-filled Pastries & Cream Pies	Pastries or pies with whipped cream topping or custard filling	Keep refrigerated. Distribute and use up to 7 days past package date.
Dry Mixes	Soup, meal-in-a-box (i.e. meal helper)	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date.
	Potato, pudding, flavored rice or pasta, seasonings	Distribute and use up to 6 months past package date. Store in a cool, dry location.
Foods in Glass or Plastic	Pickles, sauces, applesauce, pudding (includes single-serve cups)	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date. Refrigerate after opening. EXCEPTION for juice (see below).
Juice	Jars, cans or juice boxes	Distribute and use up to 6 months past package date. Refrigerate after opening.
Mixes (bakery)	Cake, muffin, cookie, pancake	Distribute and use up to 6 months after package date. Store in a cool, dry place.
Flour	Wheat, rice, soy	Distribute and use up to 1-year past package date. Store in a cool, dry place. Discard if signs of insect infestation appear.
Rice & Pasta	Unflavored	Distribute and use up to 2 years past package date.
Whole Grains	Whole wheat flour, corn meal, oatmeal	Distribute and use up to 1-year past package date. Store in a cool, dry place.
Whole Fruit & Vegetables	Uncut	Sort daily and discard as signs of spoilage appear. See Fruit & Vegetable Storage chart.

***Damaged packages** have **deep dents** with sharp edges that are large enough to rest a finger in the dent. Discard cans that are bulging, leaking or with heavy rust (pitting). **Ripped** or **torn flexible packages** should be discarded. January 2020.



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

“**Sell by**” – Quality date found on eggs, milk and lunch meat. Distribute by this date, with time still left for storage and use at home.

“**Use by or Best by**” – Quality date found on canned food and cereal. Except for baby food, product may be safely used and distributed well past this date.

“**Expiration date**” – Quality date on infant formula and vitamins. Do not distribute past date.

Keep cold foods cold! Discard packaged products that are damaged. Do not attempt to thaw frozen foods.

Food Safety Guide: Distributing and Using Refrigerated or Frozen Products

Category	Product(s)	Distribution and Use Guidelines
Butter & Margarine		Keep refrigerate or freeze. Distribute or use for up to 6 months after package date.
Cheese	Soft (cottage, string, feta, cream cheese, spread)	Distribute up to 14 days past package date; use within 1 week. Keep refrigerated.
	Hard (Cheddar, parmesan)	Distribute up to 12 months past package date. Keep refrigerated. Discard if moldy.
	Medium (muenster, brick, mozzarella)	Distribute up to 1-month past package date. Keep refrigerated. Discard if moldy.
Eggs	From a licensed processor, dated	Distribute up to 5 weeks past package date; use within 1 week. Keep refrigerated.
Juice (pasteurized)	Fresh juice, stored refrigerated	Distribute and use within 7 days of product date. Keep refrigerated.
Milk & Smoothies	Milk (reg and flavored) Smoothies	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
	Canned or boxed milk (incl dry powdered milk)	Distribute and use within 1 year of package date. Refrigerate fluid milk and use within 7 days.
Soft Desserts	Puddings, cheese cake	Distribute and use up to 2 weeks past package date. Keep refrigerated.
Yogurt & Sour Cream	Yogurt, sour cream	Distribute and use up to 3 weeks past package date. Keep refrigerated.
Casseroles or Soups	Lasagna, mac & cheese, prepared soups	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date, or freeze. Reheat thoroughly. Keep refrigerated.
Cut fruits, vegetables	Fresh salsa, diced peppers, cut fruit	Distribute and use within 4 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
Guacamole or Hummus	Individual packages or bulk	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Do not freeze. Keep refrigerated.
Leafy greens, Salad mixes	Bagged salads or Salad kits	Distribute and use within 5 days of package date. Keep refrigerated.
Meat salads	Egg, tuna, chicken	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date. Keep refrigerated, do not freeze.
Sandwiches	All meat or cheese types	Distribute and use within 7 days of package date, or freeze (removing any leafy greens). Keep refrigerated.
Tofu	All types	Distribute and use within 1 month of package date. Keep refrigerated. Do not freeze.
Poultry (chicken, turkey)	Fresh (uncooked)	Cook or freeze within 3 days. Keep cold.
	Cooked	Use within 7 days or freeze. Keep cold.
Ground Meat or Fresh sausages	Beef, chicken, turkey, pork, lamb	Cook or freeze within 3 days. Once cooked, use within 7 days. Keep cold.
Meat (beef, pork, lamb)	Fresh (uncooked)	Cook or freeze within 5 days. Keep cold.
	Cooked (incl. sausage)	Use within 7 days. Keep cold.
Ham	Fresh or canned	Distribute and cook by package date, or freeze. Use cooked ham within 2 weeks. Keep cold.
Lunch Meat, Sausage	Deli-sliced	Use within 5 days or freeze. Keep cold.
	Packaged (bacon, hot dogs, sausages, deli-style)	Distribute up to 2 weeks past date. Once opened, use or freeze within 7 days. Cook bacon and hot dogs before eating.
	Hard/dry (summer sausage)	Shelf stable. Distribute and use within 3 months of package date. Refrigerate after opening.