

Expiration Dates on Foods and Products

Certain items in your house practically scream “toss me” when their prime has passed. That mysterious extra white layer on the Cheddar? A sure sign it needs to be put out of its misery. Chunky milk? Down the drain it goes.

But what about that jar of olives or Maraschino cherries that has resided in your refrigerator since before the birth of your kindergartner? Or the innumerable non-edibles lurking deep within your cabinets and closets: stockpiled shampoo and toothpaste, seldom-used silver polish? How do you know when their primes have passed?

With help from experts and product manufacturers, *Real Simple* (<http://www.realsimple.com/>) has compiled a guide to expiration dates. These dates are offered as a rough guideline. The shelf lives of most products depend upon how you treat them. Edibles, unless otherwise indicated, should be stored in a cool, dry place. (With any food, of course, use common sense.) Household cleaners also do best in a dry place with a stable temperature. After the dates shown, beauty and cleaning products are probably still safe but may be less effective.

Food

Beer Unopened: Starts to lose flavor after 110 days. It's best to store bottles in boxes, and then in dark place. Stronger alcohol and higher levels of hops might extend the shelf life of a beer. One example is Michelob Craft Specialty beers, which are often at their peak with 180 days. (Source: Budweiser support)

Brown sugar Indefinite shelf life, stored in a moisture proof container in a cool, dry place.

Chocolate (Hershey bar) 1 year from production date

Coffee, canned ground Unopened: 2 years Opened: 1 month refrigerated

Coffee, gourmet Beans: 3 weeks in paper bag, longer in vacuum-seal bag (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)
Ground: 1 week in sealed container

Coffee, instant Unopened: Up to 2 years Opened: Up to 1 month

Diet soda (and soft drinks in plastic bottles) Unopened: 3 months from "best by" date. Opened: Doesn't spoil, but taste is affected.

Dried pasta 12 months

Frozen dinners Unopened: 12 to 18 months

Frozen vegetables Unopened: 18 to 24 months Opened: 1 month

Honey Indefinite shelf life

Juice, bottled (apple or cranberry) Unopened: 8 months from production date
Opened: 7 to 10 days

Ketchup Unopened: 1 year (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.) Opened or used: 4 to 6 months (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Maple syrup, real or imitation 1 year

Maraschino cherries Unopened: 3 to 4 years Opened: 2 weeks at room temperature;
6 months refrigerated

Marshmallows Unopened: 40 weeks Opened: 3 months

Mayonnaise Unopened: Indefinitely Opened: 2 to 3 months from "purchase by" date
(After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Mustard 2 years (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Olives, jarred (green with pimento) Unopened: 3 years Opened: 3 months

Olive oil 2 years from manufacture date (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Peanuts Unopened: 1 to 2 years unless frozen or refrigerated Opened: 1 to 2 weeks in airtight container

Peanut butter, natural 9 months

Peanut butter, processed (Jif) Unopened: 2 years Opened: 6 months; refrigerate after 3 months

Pickles Unopened: 18 months Opened: No conclusive data. Discard if slippery or excessively soft.

Protein bars (Power Bars) Unopened: 10 to 12 months. Check "best by" date on the

package.

Rice, white 2 years from date on box or date of purchase

Salad dressing, bottled Unopened: 12 months after "best by" date Opened: 9 months refrigerated

Soda, regular Unopened: In cans or glass bottles, 9 months from "best by" date
Opened: Doesn't spoil, but taste is affected

Steak sauce 33 months (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Tabasco 5 years, stored in a cool, dry place

Tea bags (Lipton) Use within 2 years of opening the package

Tuna, canned Unopened: 1 year from purchase date Opened: 3 to 4 days, not stored in can

Soy sauce, bottled Unopened: 2 years
Opened: 3 months (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.)

Vinegar 42 months

Wine (red, white) Unopened: 3 years from vintage date; 20 to 100 years for fine wines
Opened: 1 week refrigerated and corked

Worcestershire sauce Unopened: 5 to 10 years (After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but product is still generally safe to consume.) Opened: 2 years

Household Products

Air freshener, aerosol 2 years

Antifreeze, premixed 1 to 5 years
Antifreeze, concentrate Indefinite

Batteries, alkaline 7 years
Batteries, lithium 10 years

Bleach 3 to 6 months

Dish detergent, liquid or powdered 1 year

Fire extinguisher, rechargeable Service or replace every 6 years

Fire extinguisher, non-rechargeable 12 years

Laundry detergent, liquid or powdered Unopened: 9 months to 1 year Opened: 6 months

Metal polish (silver, copper, brass) At least 3 years

Miracle Gro, liquid Opened: 3 to 8 years

Miracle Gro, liquid, water-soluble Indefinite

Motor oil Unopened: 2 to 5 years Opened: 3 months

Mr. Clean 2 years

Paint Unopened: Up to 10 years Opened: 2 to 5 years

Spray paint 2 to 3 years

Windex 2 years **Wood polish (Pledge)** 2 years

Personal Care Products

All dates are from the manufacture date, which is either displayed on the packaging or can be obtained by calling the manufacturer's customer-service number.

Bar soap 18 months to 3 years

Bath gel, body wash 3 years

Bath oil 1 year

Body bleaches and depilatories Unopened: 2 years Used: 6 months

Body lotion 3 years

Conditioner 2 to 3 years

Deodorant Unopened: 2 years Used: 1 to 2 years
For antiperspirants, see expiration date

Eye cream Unopened: 3 years Used: 1 year

Face lotion With SPF, see expiration date. All others, at least 3 years

Foundation, oil-based 2 years
Foundation, water-based 3 years

Hair gel 2 to 3 years

Hair spray 2 to 3 years

Lip balm Unopened: 5 years Used: 1 to 5 years

Lipstick 2 years

Mascara Unopened: 2 years Used: 3 to 4 months

Mouthwash Three years from manufacture date

Nail polish 1 year

Nail-polish remover Lasts indefinitely

Perfume 1 to 2 years

Rubbing alcohol At least 3 years

Shampoo 2 to 3 years

Shaving cream 2 years or more

Tooth-whitening strips 13 months

Wash'n Dri moist wipes Unopened: 2 years Opened: Good until dried out

Beauty Supply Products

Anti-aging and acne treatment Three months to a year. Antioxidants are easily oxidized, so be on the lookout for any changes in color.

Bar soap Up to three years.

Bath oil One year.

Blush/Bronzer 18 months after first use

Body lotion Two to three years, particularly if it's in a pump container.

Concealer 12 months after first use

Creme eye shadow 6 months after first use

Creme blush 12 months after first use

Deodorant Up to two years.

Eye and lip pencils Three to five years. Sharpen them before each use as a way to preserve them and keep them clean.

Facial Moisturizer 12 months after first use

Foundation About two years. Most bottles are designed to last that long. And if you don't use it, chances are you didn't love it to begin with.

Hairstyling products Three to five years. Most are alcohol-based, which helps preserve the formula.

Lipstick and lip gloss 18 months after first use

Liquid eyeliner 3 months after first use

Liquid Foundation 6 months after first use

Mascara and liquid eyeliner Three to four months. Make sure you're diligent about replacing these items to prevent contamination and infections.

Nail polish 18 months after first use

Perfume About two years. To get more mileage out of a perfume, resist the temptation to display a pretty bottle on your vanity. Instead, stash it away in a cool, dark place.

Shampoo, conditioner, and shower gel About three years.

Shaving cream About two years.

Skin care products 6 months after first use

Sunscreen 6 months after first use

Learn the Lingo of Expiration Dates

The actual term "Expiration Date" refers to the last date a food should be eaten or used.

Last means last -- proceed at your own risk.

More commonly spotted terms are:

"Sell by" date. The labeling "sell by" tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires. This is basically a guide for the retailer, so the store knows when to pull the item. This is not mandatory, so reach in back and get the freshest. The issue is quality of the item (freshness, taste, and consistency) rather than whether it is on the verge of spoiling. Paul VanLandingham, EdD, a senior faculty member at the Center for Food and Beverage Management of Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I., tells WebMD the "sell by" date is the last day the item is at its highest level of quality, but it will still be edible for some time after.

"Best if used by (or before)" date. This refers strictly to quality, not safety. This date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. Sour cream, for instance, is already sour, but can have a zippier, fresh taste when freshly sour (if that's not an oxymoron!)

"Born on" date. This is the date of manufacture and has been resurrected recently to date beer. Beer can go sub-par after three months. "It is affected by sun," VanLandingham says. The light can reactivate microorganisms in the beer. That's why you have to be especially careful with beer in clear bottles, as opposed to brown or green.

"Guaranteed fresh" date. This usually refers to bakery items. They will still be edible after the date, but will not be at peak freshness.

"Use by" date. This is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.

"Pack" date. You will find this one on canned or packaged goods, as a rule, but it's tricky. In fact, it may be in code. It can be month-day-year-MMDDYY. Or the manufacturer could revert to the Julian calendar. January would then be 001-0031 and December 334-365. It gets even weirder than that.