

For Immediate Release: March 2003  
Contact:  
Have You Checked Your Pantry Lately??

How long has this can been in the pantry? How long is it safe to store this shortening?

The following storage tips are based on food stored at a room temperature of about 65° to 70° F in your cupboard or your pantry. Times given will maintain the best food quality. Generally, these foods do not create a problem of spoilage, but lose quality or flavor. A range of times and more conservative recommendations are given to allow for the age of the product when purchased, how long it has been open, and so forth. Read labels carefully for storage information and check the "use by" date. If that has expired, tell the store manager and don't buy it since it has already been packaged too long.

Baking powder and baking soda can be stored 12 to 18 months with no loss of quality. Store them tightly covered in a dry place. Make sure measuring utensils are dry before dipping into the container-moisture will cause deterioration.

The Canned Food Alliance recommends eating canned food within 2 years of processing for best quality. Many cans will include a "for best quality use by-" date stamped on the can. After opening a can, do not store it in the refrigerator in the can; some food can develop an off-odor from the can.

Shortening will keep 3 to 8 months opened and 8 to 12 months unopened. After opening, store in a tightly closed container in a cool, dark place. Shortening that has been stored too long will go rancid and develop an undesirable taste and odor. If you haven't used it for a while, smell it before putting it in a recipe.

Storage times vary with type of vegetable oil, but 1 to 6 months opened and 6 to 12 months unopened is recommended. Some companies recommend 1 year opened and 2 years unopened. After opening, you can prolong the life of the oils by storing them in the refrigerator, and again, smell them to be sure they have not turned rancid. Almond, walnut, sesame and hazelnut oils may have a shorter storage life. Some oils get cloudy or solidify a little in the refrigerator, but usually clear after warming up to room temperature.

Spices and herbs may be stored up to 1 year for herbs or ground spices, 2 years for whole spices. Air, light, moisture and heat speed flavor and color loss of herbs and spices. Store them in tightly covered containers in a dark place away from sunlight, such as inside a cupboard or drawer. For open spice rack storage, choose a site away from light, heat and moisture.

Keep moisture out of storage containers by (1) avoiding storage above or near the stove, dishwasher, microwave, refrigerator, sink or heating vent; and (2) always using a dry spoon to remove spices or herbs and never sprinkling them directly from the container into a steaming pot.

Get in the habit of smelling your spices and herbs periodically; learn what fresh smells like so you can detect if they are getting old. For whole spices, break, crush or scrape them before smelling. For herbs, crush a small amount in your hand and smell it; if the aroma is fresh and pleasant, it can still flavor foods.

Now that you have sorted, tossed, moved or repackaged, and, perhaps, revived some foods, here are a few tips to take control of storing foods in your cupboard: If you tossed portions of expired foods, buy a smaller container next time. Keep a permanent marker pen handy and date your purchases; and practice "first in, first out", referred to as "FIFO" in food service establishments. Read labels carefully for storage information and recommended "use by" dates.

For a more complete list of storage times, not only for the cupboard, but also the refrigerator and freezer, log on to the University of Wyoming Extension Food and Nutrition web site; [www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition](http://www.uwyo.edu/cesnutrition), and click on "food storage", or contact your local Cooperative Extension office for information.

The Wyoming Food Safety Coalition provides food safety education for the people of Wyoming.

Sources: Food Reflections, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension in Lancaster County Virginia Romero-Caron and Stella McKinstry, University Extension Educators, Nutrition and Food Safety Initiative Team, University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service