



# FOOD DATING GUIDE

*A resource for product dates,  
codes and extensions*

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### **About this Guide**

Food Bank For New York City receives donations of food products with code dates (such as best-by and use-by) that have passed or are quickly approaching. Food dates on packages are provided by manufacturers to ensure best quality, and in most cases, are not reflective of food safety. Consumers will often choose not to buy these items. These items are often donated to Food Bank near or after the date on the package. Food Bank sorts through donations and checks dates, applying the extensions indicated in this guide. Should you receive a product with a code date that has passed, please consult this guide for the suggested extension. This guide contains recommendations for product date extensions based on ideal storage conditions and package integrity.



***Information last updated February 2023***

## Understanding Dates on Food Packages and Medicine

Many foods can be consumed well past the date on the package if handled and stored properly. There are several different types of dates on food packages; understanding the meanings of these dates can help you determine if foods are still safe to eat.

Type of Date	Example	Found On	What It Means
Expiration Date	1) Expires 5/15/2024  2) Do not use after 5/15/24	Baby food, infant formula, medicines, vitamins, yeast, baking powder	Baby food, infant formula, and over-the-counter medicines are the only products that are required by law to have expiration dates. These items should NOT be distributed or used past this date. Yeast and baking powder do not work as well after their expiration date, but are still safe to use.
Pack Date	1) Packed on 3/13/23	Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices, shelf stable items	This is the date on which the product was packaged. These products have a long shelf life, have good quality, and can be safe to eat past the date. Often paired with a best by date.
Packing Code	1) KL064  2) 22:5306412	Canned food, crackers, cookies, spices, shelf stable items	Manufacturer's code not meant to be used by the general public. This date is used by manufacturers for tracking and recall purposes.
Sell By Date	1) Sell by 6/1/23	Refrigerated foods: milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, lunch meat, packaged salad mixes	This is the date that the store must sell the food by before pulling it from the shelves. Stores often donate food when they are close to the sell by date. If the food has been handled properly, it is still safe to eat and the quality is good.
Use By Date	1) Use By 5/29/24	Crackers, cookies, cold cereals, other dry/shelf-stable food	This date is the manufacturer's recommendation for ensuring food is at peak quality. After the use by date has passed, the food is safe to eat but nutrients and quality begin to slowly decrease.
Best By Date	1) Best Before Mar.31.23  2) Best if Used By Aug 01 24	Shelf-stable products, canned goods, cereals, perishable products sensory quality. Not an indicator of safety.	The recommended date to use this product for the best physical and sensory quality.

## Julian Dates

Some products use Julian Dates instead of traditional food dates. Julian Dates are 5-digit codes that represent when a product was packaged or manufactured. The first two digits in the code represent the current year, and the last 3 digits represent the number of days that have passed since the first day of the year.

For example, a Julian date of 22 031 represents January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022 and a Julian date of 22 365 represents December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. Use the table below when assessing food items with Julian Dates. *\*Please note Julian dates vary on leap years.*

DAY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	DAY
1	1	32	60	91	121	152	182	213	244	274	305	335	1
2	2	33	61	92	122	153	183	214	245	275	306	336	2
3	3	34	62	93	123	154	184	215	246	276	307	337	3
4	4	35	63	94	124	155	185	216	247	277	308	338	4
5	5	36	64	95	125	156	186	217	248	278	309	339	5
6	6	37	65	96	126	157	187	218	249	279	310	340	6
7	7	38	66	97	127	158	188	219	250	280	311	341	7
8	8	39	67	98	128	159	189	220	251	281	312	342	8
9	9	40	68	99	129	160	190	221	252	282	313	343	9
10	10	41	69	100	130	161	191	222	253	283	314	344	10
11	11	42	70	101	131	162	192	223	254	284	315	345	11
12	12	43	71	102	132	163	193	224	255	285	316	346	12
13	13	44	72	103	133	164	194	225	256	286	317	347	13
14	14	45	73	104	134	165	195	226	257	287	318	348	14
15	15	46	74	105	135	166	196	227	258	288	319	349	15
16	16	47	75	106	136	167	197	228	259	289	320	350	16
17	17	48	76	107	137	168	198	229	260	290	321	351	17
18	18	49	77	108	138	169	199	230	261	291	322	352	18
19	19	50	78	109	139	170	200	231	262	292	323	353	19
20	20	51	79	110	140	171	201	232	263	293	324	354	20
21	21	52	80	111	141	172	202	233	264	294	325	355	21
22	22	53	81	112	142	173	203	234	265	295	326	356	22
23	23	54	82	113	143	174	204	235	266	296	327	357	23
24	24	55	83	114	144	175	205	236	267	297	328	358	24
25	25	56	84	115	145	176	206	237	268	298	329	359	25
26	26	57	85	116	146	177	207	238	269	299	330	360	26
27	27	58	86	117	147	178	208	239	270	300	331	361	27
28	28	59	87	118	148	179	209	240	271	301	332	362	28
29	29		88	119	149	180	210	241	272	302	333	363	29
30	30		89	120	150	181	211	242	273	303	334	364	30
31	31		90		151		212	243		304		365	31

## Shelf-Stable Products

Most dry/shelf-stable products are edible long past their code dates. Remember to examine the packaging, as the extensions in this guide are based on packaging that has not been damaged.

### Do **not** distribute or consume cans or jars if they are/have:

- Leaking or stained
- Swollen
- Rusty
- Sharply dented, or dented along the seams
- Cracked
- Missing label
- Foul odor
- Missing or broken safety seal
- Loose or missing lid
- Change in color or odor of the food item



### Do **not** distribute or consume boxes if:

- Inside bag is torn or leaking, has moldy or foreign objects inside, or seals are ripped
- Box (if product does not have an internal bag) is open or torn, has live or dead insects/webs/droppings, is stained or wet

### Tips for storing canned and boxed foods:

- Store cans and boxes 6 inches off the floor (on a pallet or shelf) and away from the wall for circulation
- Store canned and boxed goods in a cool, dry space
- Always date and rotate stock – First In First Out (FIFO)

### Tips for storing bagged grains:

- Keep bags of grains (rice, polenta, oatmeal, pasta, granola, grits, cream of wheat, etc.) in plastic bins. Pests love these items and can easily bite through thin, plastic bags or paper packaging.

<b>Shelf-Stable Foods</b>	<b>Shelf-Life <u>After</u> Code Date</b>
<b>Aseptically Packaged Products (carton)</b>	
Broth: beef, chicken, vegetable	1 year
Soup	6 months
<b>Baby Food</b>	
Cereal, food, formula	Do not consume after expiration date on package
<b>Beverages/Mixes – shelf-stable <u>only</u></b>	
Carbonated drinks (including seltzer, tonic water or club soda)	6 months
Coffee (ground or whole)	1 year
Coffee creamer, powder	2 years
Hot chocolate	1 year
Instant breakfast	6 months
Juice (bottled or canned)	1 year
Milk (UHT, shelf-stable)	1 year
Nutrition aid supplements	Do not consume after date on package
Rice milk, soy milk, almond milk	6 months
Tea	3 years
Water (plain, bottled)	Plain bottled water can be kept indefinitely – always store in a cool, dark place away from chemicals. Packaging can deteriorate over time.
<b>Canned Foods</b>	
<u>High-Acid Foods</u> (fruit, applesauce, juice, pickles, sauerkraut, baked beans, tomatoes, tomato sauces, tomato-based soups, refried beans)	18 months
<u>Low-Acid Foods</u> (gravy, non-tomato-based soup/broth, pasta, stews, cream sauces, vegetables other than tomatoes, beans, fish, meat)	4 years
Pie Filling	3 years
<b>Condiments, Sauces, Syrups</b>	
Barbeque sauce	1 year
Cocktail Sauce	1 year
Frosting tubs	1 year
Gravy (dry mix envelopes)	2 years
Honey, molasses, syrups (chocolate, corn, pancake)	2 years
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months

Ketchup	1 year
Mayonnaise	6 months
Mustard and relish	2 years
Olives	1 year
Pickles	1 year
Salsa	1 year
Salad dressings	1 year
Soy sauce, teriyaki sauce	3 years
Spaghetti sauce	18 months
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	1 year
<b>Dry Goods</b>	
Baking mixes (cake mix, pancake mix)	1 year
Baking powder/soda	3 years; may be less effective
Bars (i.e. granola, protein, cereal)	18 months
Beans and lentils, dried	2 years
Bouillon cubes	2 years
Breads, cakes (commercially prepared, room temperature)	5 days
Candy	1 year
Casserole mix	1 year
Cereal (hot or cold)	1 year
Coffee Creamer, powdered	2 years
Cookies	6 months
Cornmeal	1 year
Crackers	9 months
Flour	6 months (whole wheat), 1 year (white)
Fruit, dried	6 months
Macaroni & cheese mix	1 year
Nuts (jar or can)	1 year
Nut oils	6 months
Oils (olive, vegetable, canola)	1 year
Oil sprays	2 years
Pasta, dry	3 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, commercially popped and bagged	3 months
Popcorn, microwave packets	1 year
Potato chips	2 months
Potatoes (mashed, instant flakes)	1 year
Rice, brown	1 year



Rice, white	2 years
Rice mixes	6 months
Shortening	1 year
Spices	3 years
Stuffing mix	1 year
Sugar	3 years
Toaster pastries	1 year
Tortillas/wraps	3 months
Quinoa, dry	3 years



## Refrigerated Products



### Tips for storing refrigerated food:

- Keep all chilled food refrigerated at or below 41° F.
- Leave space for air to circulate between items in the refrigerator.
- Keep raw meats, poultry or fish on the bottom shelf and ready- to-eat food on top to avoid dangerous cross contamination from drips.
- Rotate stock so older foods can be distributed first.

<b>Refrigerated Foods</b>	<b>Shelf-Life <u>After</u> Code Date when stored in the <u>REFRIGERATOR</u></b>
Bagged lettuce	3 days
Bean sprouts, bagged	7 days
Butter	2 months
Buttermilk	2 weeks
Cheese (soft – cottage, ricotta, cream cheese)	2 weeks
Cheese (hard – parmesan, blocks of cheese)	6 months
Cheese (processed – slices, string, shredded)	1 month
Cheese, vegan	2 months
Coffee creamer (liquid, refrigerated)	3 weeks
Cream (half & half, heavy, light)	1 week
Deli meats	5 days
Desserts	4 days
Dips, mixed	5 days
Dough, pie crust	“Sell-by date” on package
Eggs (hardboiled)	1 week
Eggs (in shell)	1 month
Eggs (liquid substitute)	1 week
Fruit, cut	4 days
Guacamole	3 days
Hot dogs	2 weeks
Hummus	1 week
Juice, fresh squeezed or pressed	5 days
Juice, purchased refrigerated	3 weeks
Margarine	6 months
Meat – poultry, ground beef, pork, fish, seafood, venison	Follow “use-by date”; or cook/freeze within 1-3 days of “sell-by date.”
Milk (not shelf-stable)	1 week

Milk alternatives (purchased refrigerated, soy, almond, rice, oat)	10 days
Pasta, fresh	2 days
Pudding, purchased refrigerated	2 days
Salads, prepared (macaroni, tuna, egg, potato)	2 days
Salsa, fresh	4 days
Sour cream	3 weeks
Tofu	1 week
Whipped cream, can	1 month
Yogurt	2 weeks

## Frozen Products

Most food can be kept indefinitely if it remains continuously frozen at or below 0°F, although the quality will slowly deteriorate over time.



### Tips for storing frozen food:

- Keep all frozen food at or below 0° F until distribution.
- Leave meat, poultry, and seafood in the original packaging when distributing. It is unsafe to open and repack these foods.
- Do not accept frozen foods that have ice crystals or frozen liquids- this is evidence of the food being previously thawed and then refrozen. Freezer burn does not make food unsafe- it appears as grayish-brown leathery spots and just means air came in contact with the food.
- Meat should not be thawed and refrozen. Once meat is thawed, use it according to the information in following table.
- Most foods can be frozen indefinitely, but some foods do not freeze well. These foods include mayonnaise, cream sauce, yogurt, cheese, sour cream, milk and lettuce. Raw meat and poultry will maintain their quality longer when frozen than cooked meat and poultry because moisture is lost during cooking.
- Items that should not be frozen are canned foods, shell eggs, and aerosol cans. **Safe thawing:** Never thaw foods at room temperature! Bacteria grow rapidly at room temperature and can make your food dangerous to eat. You can thaw food safely in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave.

Frozen Food	Recommended Time to Store Frozen Items in the Refrigerator
Bacon, ham, lunch meats, hot dogs, pepperoni (unopened)	2 weeks
Desserts	1 week
Dinners, prepared	1 week
Dough, bread, bagels	1 week
Fruit and juice concentrate	1 week
Meat and fish, cooked	4 days
Meat and fish, raw	2 days
Soy meat substitutes	4 days
Vegetables	1 week
Waffles, pancakes	1 week

## Fresh Produce

### Tips for storing fresh produce:

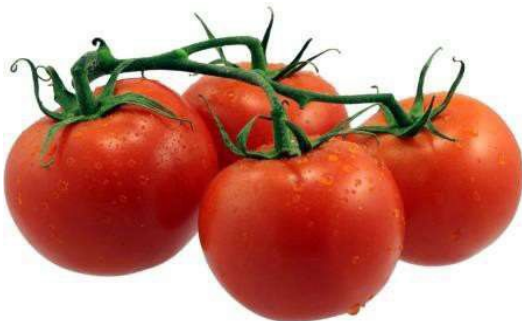
Most fruits and vegetables have the best quality when kept refrigerated. There are, however, some exceptions:

- Tomatoes taste best if *not* refrigerated. Cold storage can cause them to become mealy.
- Bananas should not be refrigerated unless fully ripe, and then they should be used within 1-2 days. Refrigeration will cause banana skin to blacken, but the fruit will not ripen while cold.
- Unripe 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 should be stored in cool, dark places outside of the refrigerator.
- Store your potatoes and onions separately! Onions release a gas that can speed up sprouting in potatoes.
- Do not consume potatoes that have turned green. This is an indicator of high levels of the toxin solanine. Ingesting too much solanine can cause gastrointestinal and neurological symptoms. Solanine levels increase when potatoes are exposed to light.

Never store produce below meat or fish in the refrigerator. Raw meat and fish can contaminate produce that is stored below it!

If you have produce that is about to spoil, be creative! Use these options in your soup kitchen or encourage clients to use them if they are being offered in the pantry.

- Brown bananas are perfect for banana bread
- Apples can be made into applesauce
- Tomatoes can be made into tomato sauce
- Limp vegetables like celery and carrots can be used in soups



## Produce Storage



### Refrigerator

Apples (>7 days)

Apricots

Cantaloupe



Figs

Honeydew

(Unwashed in a Single Layer)

Black Berries

Blueberries



Raspberries

Strawberries

(Unwashed in a Plastic Bag)

Broccoli

Carrots

Cauliflower



Green Onions

Lettuce

(Store in a Paper Bag)

Mushrooms



Okra

Artichokes

Asparagus

Beets

Brussels Sprouts

Cabbage

Celery

Cherries



Grapes

Green Beans

Herbs (not Basil)

Kale

Lima Beans

Leafy Vegetables

Leeks

Plums

Spinach

Sprouts

Summer Squash

Yellow Squash

Zucchini



### Countertop

Apples (<7 days)

Bananas



Tomatoes

Basil

Cucumbers

Eggplant

Garlic

Ginger

Grapefruit

Jicama

Lemons

Limes



Mangoes

Oranges

Papaya

Peppers

Persimmons

Pineapple

Plantains

Pomegranates

Watermelon



### Cool Dry Place

Acorn Squash

Butternut Squash

Potatoes\*

Winter Squash

Pumpkins

Onions\*

Sweet Potatoes

Spaghetti Squash

**\*Store away from each other!**

### Counter/Fridge

(Ripen on Counter, Then Refrigerate)

Avocados

Nectarines

Plums



Pears

Peaches

Kiwi



**High Ethylene Producers!**

Keep away from other fresh produce to slow down ripening/spoilage

## Food Safety Resources

For more information on how you can keep food safe, please visit:

[www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

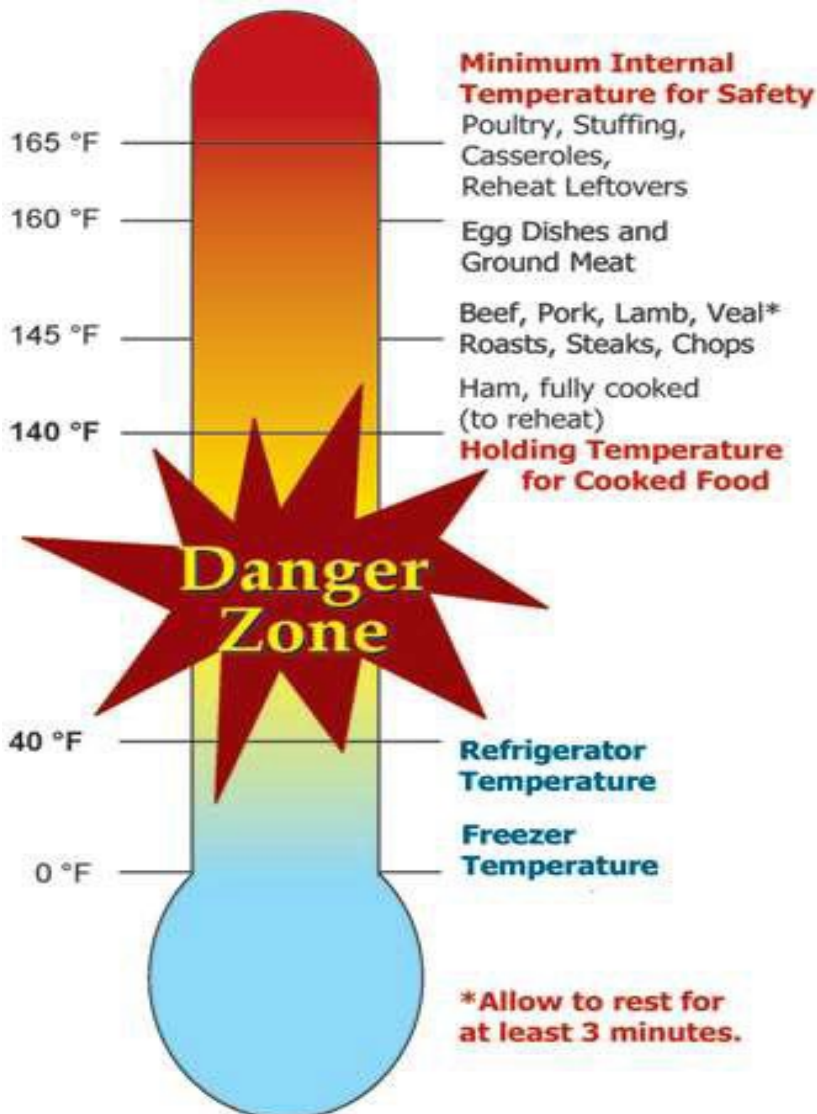
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

[www.servsafe.com](http://www.servsafe.com)

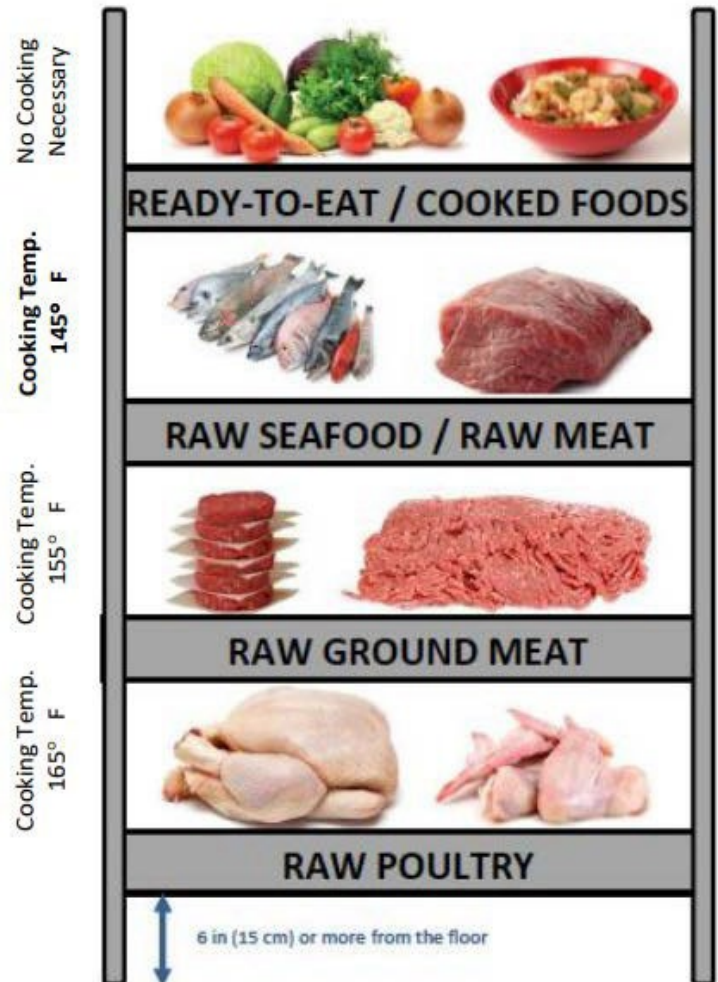
The **Temperature Danger Zone** is the range between 40° F and 140° F in which bacteria reproduce rapidly. Try to keep food out of this range!

The "**Big 9**" Food Allergens: Milk, Eggs, Fish, Shellfish, Tree Nuts, Peanuts, Wheat, Soy, and Sesame.

### Cooking Temperatures



### Safe Refrigerator Storage



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## About Food Bank For New York City

**To end hunger by organizing food, information and support for community survival and dignity.** Food Bank For New York City has been working to end food poverty in our five boroughs for 40 years. As the city's largest hunger-relief organization, we employ a multifaceted approach centered on helping low-income New Yorkers overcome their circumstances and achieve greater independence.

