

# FOOD DATING GUIDE

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**Feeding Westchester** often receives food items that are close to or past the indicated date on their package. The majority of the time, the food is still safe to eat! Food manufacturers use different date codes and terms to ensure that consumers receive their product at peak quality. Once a product is past code date, it can still be of good quality and safe to eat, thus many manufacturers donate it to food banks around that time. Feeding Westchester staff monitor this food to ensure that the quality remains good.

This guide explains the different code dates and terms you will find on food packages. Also included are suggestions for how long it's safe to consume food items after the printed dates on the package, and some information about Feeding Westchester and the services we provide.

Should any questions arise about items not included in this guide, call our nutritionist, Danice Tatosian, at 914-923-1100 or email [dtatosian@feedingwestchester.org](mailto:dtatosian@feedingwestchester.org) with your question. We will determine a safe extension for the product in question as quickly as possible and add it to future revisions of the Food Dating Guide.

The following guide contains our best suggestions for how long food is safe to eat after the printed date. These dates are based on optimal storage conditions and no damage. If you are ever in doubt, throw it out!



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# Understanding Dates on Food Packages and Medicines

Many food products can be kept past their dates if they are handled properly. Understanding the different terms on food packages can help you decide if a food is still safe to eat. Here are some common date terms explained:

## Expiration date

The only items required by federal law to have expiration dates are baby formula and medications; do not distribute or consume these items past the expiration date. Some states require eggs to have expiration dates, but they can still be safe to eat 3-5 weeks after their expiration dates.

## Sell-by date

This is the date the stores must sell the food by. The manufacturer takes into account that the item will be stored at home after the sell-by date. Because stores cannot sell products after the sell-by date, they usually donate the foods when they are close to this date. If the foods have been handled properly, they are still safe to eat and the quality is good.



**Food manufacturers use different date codes and terms to ensure that consumers receive their product at peak quality.**





## Use-by date

This date is the manufacturer's recommendation for how long the food will be at peak quality. After the use-by date, the food is still safe to eat but will slowly begin to lose nutrients.

## Pack date

This is the date on which the product was packaged. This date is used by manufacturers for tracking purposes. These products have a long shelf life, have good quality, and can be safe to eat past the date. (Refer to the individual product chart for more detailed references.)

## Best-by date

This date indicates when a product will be at its best level of flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

## Packing Codes

These codes enable manufacturers to rotate their stock and locate their products in the event of a recall. Codes appear as a series of letters and/or numbers and refer to the date the product was packed. The codes are not meant for the consumer to interpret them as a "best if used by" date.



# Shelf-Stable Products

Even though shelf-stable products and dry goods can be safe to eat past their dates, always examine the packaging according to the following guidelines.

## Tips on Storing Canned and Boxed Food:

Store cans and boxes 6 inches off the floor, either on a pallet or shelf, and 18 inches away from the wall so air can circulate.

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Store canned and boxed goods in a clean, dry, and cool area.

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

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Always rotate your stock—first in, first out! Distribute or use older products before newer ones.



## Do Not Consume Food from Cans, Jars or Bags, and If:

Leaking or stained

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Swollen

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Rusty

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Badly dented, crimped, or pinched

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Container is cracked or torn

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Releasing a foul odor

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Safety seals are broken or missing

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Lids are loose or missing

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Foods exhibit changed color or odor—never taste suspicious foods!



## Do Not Consume Food from Boxes If:

Inside bag is torn or leaking

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Moldy or foreign objects are inside

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Seals are ripped

## Box Without an Inside Bag:

Is open or torn

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Has live or dead insects, webs, or droppings inside

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Is stained or wet







## Shelf-Stable Items

## Shelf Life After Code Date

### Baby Food/Formula

Cereal, food and formula	Do not consume after expiration date on package
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### Beverages/Mixes

Carbonated drinks	6 months
Coffee (ground or whole)	1 year
Coffee creamer, powder	2 years
Hot chocolate mix	1 year
Juice (bottled or canned)	1 year
Milk (canned, condensed)	1 year
Milk, powdered	4 years

Nutrition aid supplements	Do not consume after expiration date on package
Rice milk, soy milk	6 months
Tea	3 years

### Canned Foods

#### HIGH-ACID FOODS

Fruit (including applesauce, juices)	18 months
Pickles, sauerkraut	18 months
Baked beans w/ mustard and vinegar	18 months
Refried beans	18 months
Tomatoes, tomato-based sauces and soups	18 months

#### LOW-ACID FOODS

Gravy, soups/broths (non-tomato based)	4 years
Pasta, stews, cream sauces	4 years
Vegetables (except tomatoes)	4 years
Fish and meat	4 years







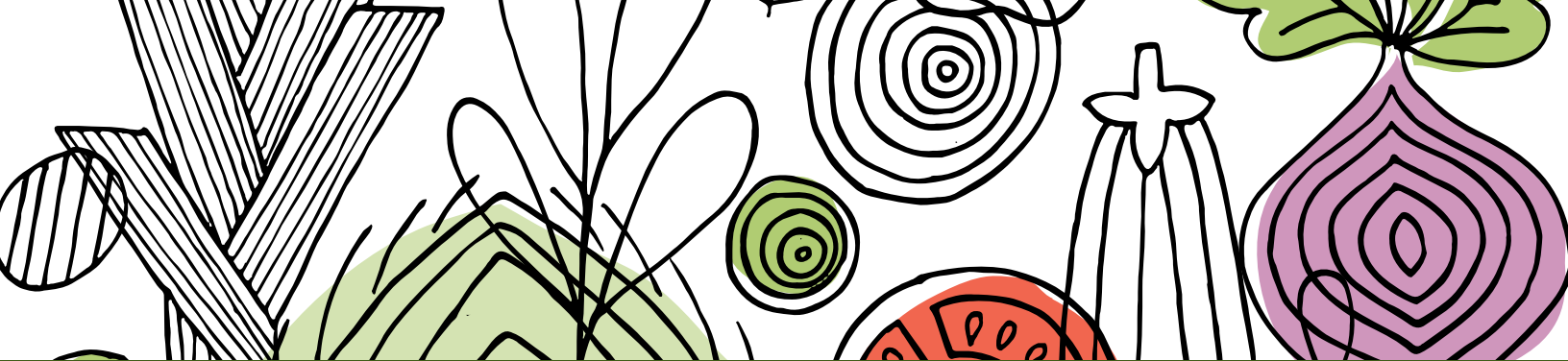
## Shelf-Stable Items (cont.)

## Shelf Life After Code Date (cont.)

### Condiments/Sauces/Syrups

Barbeque	1 year
Frosting, tubs	1 year
Honey, molasses, syrups (chocolate, corn, pancake)	2 years
Jams, jellies, preserves	18 months
Ketchup, cocktail sauce, chili sauce, salsa	1 year
Mayonnaise	6 months
Mustard	2 years
Olives	1 year
Pickles	1 year
Salad dressings	1 year
Soy sauce, teriyaki sauce	3 years
Vinegar	2 years
Worcestershire sauce	1 year





## Shelf-Stable Items (cont.)

## Shelf Life After Code Date (cont.)

### Dry Goods

Baking mixes (cake mix, pancake mix)	1 year
Baking powder/soda	3 years
Bars (e.g., granola, protein, cereal)	18 months
Beans and lentils, dried	2 years
Bouillon cubes	2 years
Bread, cakes (commercially prepared)	5 days
<i>* Frozen breads and cakes can be kept indefinitely as long as the food remains frozen. Once thawed, they can be kept in the refrigerator for 5 days.</i>	
Candy	1 year
Cereal	1 year
Coffee creamer, powdered	2 years
Cookies	6 months
Cornmeal	1 year
Crackers, pretzels	9 months
Flour	6 months (whole wheat), 1 year (white)
Fruit, dried	6 months
Macaroni and cheese mix	1 year
Nuts (jar or can)	1 year
Nut oils	6 months





## Shelf-Stable Items (cont.)

## Shelf Life After Code Date (cont.)

### Dry Goods (cont.)

Oats	8 months
Oils (olive, vegetable, canola)	1 year
Oil sprays (ex. PAM)	2 years
Pasta, dry	3 years
Peanut butter	18 months
Popcorn, kernels	2 years
Popcorn, popped and pre-bagged	3 months
Popcorn, microwave packets	1 year
Potato chips	2 months
Potatoes (mashed, instant flakes)	1 year
Quinoa, dry	3 years
Rice, brown	1 year
Rice, white	2 years
Spices	3 years
Sugar	3 years
Toaster pastries	1 year
Tortillas/wraps	3 months



# Refrigerated Products

## Tips on Storing Refrigerated Food

Keep all chilled food refrigerated at or below 41° F until consuming or distributing it.

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Leave space for air to circulate between items in the refrigerator.

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Keep raw meats, poultry, or fish on the bottom shelf and ready-to-eat food on the top shelf to avoid dangerous cross-contamination from drips.

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Rotate stock so older foods can be distributed first.

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You can safely consume most homemade leftovers for up to 7 days as long as it's kept at or below 41° F.

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When purchasing or receiving prepared foods not listed in this table, ensure that the product has been properly refrigerated and follow package use-by date.







## Refrigerated Items

## Safe Refrigeration Time After Code Date

Bagged lettuce	3 days
Bean sprouts, bagged	7 days
Butter	2 months
Buttermilk	2 weeks
Cheese (cottage, ricotta, soft, cream cheese)	2 weeks
Cheese, hard	6 months
Cheese (shredded, string)	1 month
Cheese, vegan	2 months
Cheese, processed slices, shredded	1 month
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 in shell	1 month
Eggs, pasteurized; substitute or real	7 days
Fruit, cut	4 days
Guacamole	3 days
Hot Dogs	2 weeks
Hummus	1 week
Juice, fresh	5 days
Margarine	6 months
Meat, poultry, ground beef, pork, fish, seafood, venison	Follow use-by date or cook/freeze within 1-3 days of date
Milk	1 week
Milk alternatives (soy, almond, rice)	10 days
Pasta, fresh	2 days
Pudding, purchased refrigerated	2 days
Salads, prepared (macaroni, egg, tuna, etc.)	2 days
Sour cream	3 weeks
Tofu	1 week
Whipped cream, aerosol	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 can slowly deteriorate over time.

## Tips on 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.

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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 into contact with the food.

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All meat from Feeding Westchester is distributed frozen. Meat should not be thawed and refrozen. Once meat is thawed, use it according to the information in the following table.

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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.

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Items that should not be frozen include canned foods, eggs, aerosol cans.

**Safe thawing:  
never thaw foods at  
room temperature!  
Bacteria grows 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 Items

## Recommended Time to Store Frozen Items in 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 on Storing Fresh Produce

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

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

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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.

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Unripe apples, avocados, mangoes, and stone fruits (plums, peaches, etc.) should be at room temperature until ripened, but these items should be refrigerated once ripe.

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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.

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Never store produce below meat or fish in the refrigerator. If you have produce that is about to spoil, be creative!

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Brown bananas are perfect for banana bread, apples can be made into applesauce, and tomatoes can be made into tomato sauce.





# Storage of Fruit and Vegetables

## Refrigerator

Apples (>7 days)\*      Figs\*  
Apricots\*                Honeydews\*  
Cantaloupes\*

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(Unwashed in a Single Layer)

Blackberries              Raspberries  
Blueberries                Strawberries

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(Unwashed in a Plastic Bag)

Broccoli                    Green Onions  
Carrots                     Lettuce  
Cauliflower

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(Store in a Paper Bag)

Mushrooms                Okra

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Artichokes                Kale  
Asparagus                Lima Beans  
Beets                        Leafy Vegetables  
Brussels Sprouts            Leeks  
Cabbage                    Plums  
Celery                        Spinach  
Cherries                    Sprouts  
Grapes                      Summer Squash  
Green Beans                Yellow Squash  
Herbs (except Basil)        Zucchini

## Countertop

Apples (>7 days)\*      Tomatoes\*  
Bananas\*

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Basil                        Mangoes  
Cucumbers                Oranges  
Eggplants                 Papayas  
Garlic                      Peppers  
Ginger                      Persimmons  
Grapefruits                Pineapples  
Jicamas                    Plantains  
Lemons                    Pomegranates  
Limes                        Watermelons

## Cool, Dry Place

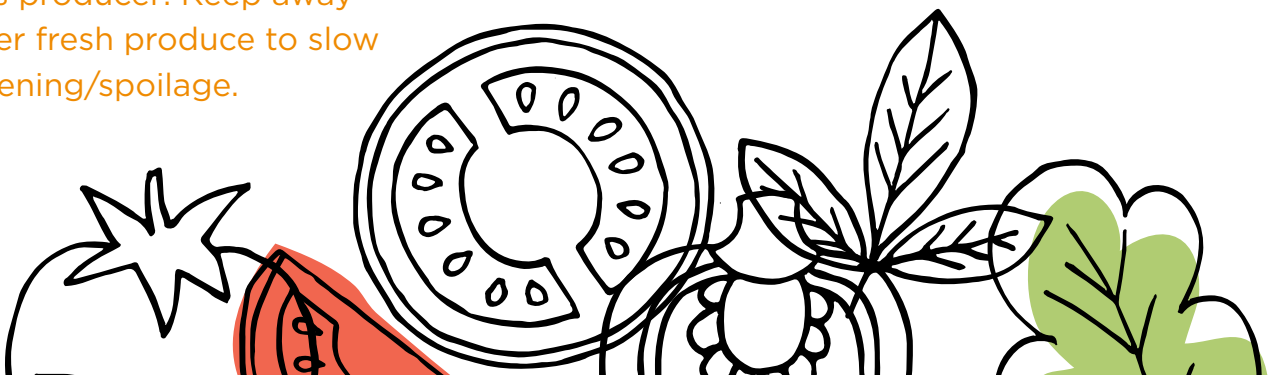
Acorn Squash              Pumpkins  
Butternut Squash         Onions  
Potatoes                    Sweet Potatoes  
Winter Squash              Spaghetti Squash

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## Counter/Fridge

Avocados\*                 Pears\*  
Nectarines\*                Peaches\*  
Plums\*

\*High gas producer: Keep away from other fresh produce to slow down ripening/spoilage.



# Programs at Feeding Westchester

## Backpack Program

This program distributes backpacks to children in high-need areas of Westchester who are eligible for free or reduced-lunch. These backpacks provide non-perishable foods to children who may not have enough food to eat while away from school.

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## SNAP

We have a SNAP coordinator and expert here at Feeding Westchester, helping reduce hunger in our county by helping seniors in the community register for SNAP benefits.

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## Mobile Food Pantry

Our refrigerated Mobile Food Pantry truck brings perishable and non-perishable foods to various food deserts around the county daily, bringing food to those who do not have it readily available or nearby.

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## Nutrition Education Programs

There are two nutritionists working for Feeding Westchester. They provide various nutrition workshops to the community, as well as a resource for anyone who might need nutritional information.

## Senior Grocery Program

Our senior nutrition program helps provide the seniors of Westchester County with healthy and nutritious foods through monthly deliveries.

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## Fresh Market

The Fresh Market is our “Mobile Farm Stand,” which brings a minimum of 10,000 pounds of fresh, nutritious produce to designated locations throughout Westchester County.

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## Green Thumb Produce Program

This produce program provides a yearly total of 1.5 million pounds of fresh, nutritious, top-quality produce, which is distributed to our agency partners in Westchester County.

# Planning a Successful Food Drive

## First: Get Ready!

### 1. Form a Food Drive Team

Choose a person who will be responsible for communication with us.

### 2. Determine the Type of Food Drive

See the next page or visit [feedingwestchester.org](http://feedingwestchester.org).

### 3. Set Your Timeline

Determine the dates on which your food drive will start and end, then let us know!



## Second: Get Set!

### 4. Establish Your Collection Location(s)

Be sure no food is placed or stored on the ground.

### 5. Gather Sturdy Collection Bins (Photocopy Boxes Work Well)

You can also call to arrange a time to pick up collection bins from us.

### 6. Label Boxes with Food Drive Information (Flyers, Etc.)



## **7. Promote Your Food Drive**

Hang posters, hand out flyers, send emails, post about it on Facebook, provide participants with a bag to take to the grocery store, hold a competition for which group donates the most food, organize an event for which a food donation is the price of admission, plan a special day for the donation of a particular item (e.g., Canned Fruit on Tuesday.)

## **8. Consider Offering a Money Donation Option**

Suggest cash, checks, or an online donation at our website (and indicate the Food Drive it relates to). Remember that for each \$1 donated, we can source \$4 worth of food!

## **9. Share our Website and Facebook Page with Participants**

## **10. Consider Additional Volunteer Projects**

Be sure you have created a volunteer profile online at [feedingwestchester.org](http://feedingwestchester.org).

## **Now Go!**

## **11. Contact us Before the Food Drive Ends to Arrange Delivery Options**

Food drive dropoff hours:

Monday to Friday (8 a.m.-3 p.m.).

We will provide you with a receipt and thank you letter for total pounds collected. Make sure you publicize your results to give your participants the satisfaction of a job well done!

## **12. Review the Event and Set the Date for Next Year!**





# Most-Needed Food Drive Items

Beans (canned or dry)  
Cereals (whole grain)  
Canned meat/fish  
Milk (shelf stable)  
Canned meals (low sodium)  
Canned vegetables (low sodium)  
Canned or dried fruit  
Peanut butter  
Pasta and rice

You can help improve the health of your neighbors.  
When choosing items for the food drive, please look for labels which read:

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| * Low sodium       | * No salt added  |
| * No sugar added   | * Unsweetened    |
| * No salt added    | * Reduced sodium |
| * 100% fruit juice | * Whole grains   |

## Interested in Volunteering?

Please visit our website at [feedingwestchester.org](http://feedingwestchester.org).

