

Food staples – The cupboard cleanup

How can I know if my flour has gone bad? When does oil become rancid? Let's determine when to toss or keep pantry staples. With Spring certainly upon us, it beckons the need to clean our home and partake in our yearly spring cleanup.

One of the most important areas to clean is our pantries. Spring is where pesky insects can breed in our food products and with the warmer weather, rancidity can easily occur. Below is a list of common pantry staples, their storage suggestions and use-by dates:

Common pantry staples

All-purpose flour

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place

Storage duration: 10 to 15 months

Comments: Heat and moisture accelerate staleness. When weather is hot or humid, keep flour in the freezer.

Whole wheat flour

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place; refrigerator/freezer

Storage duration: Cool, dry place or refrigerator: 1 to 2 months; freezer: 6 months

Comments: The oil in the bran quickly becomes rancid at room temperature.

Whole grains

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place; refrigerator/freezer

Storage duration: Cool, dry place: 2 to 3 months; refrigerator: 6 months; freezer: 1 year

Comments: The oil in the bran layer quickly becomes rancid at room temperature.

White rice

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place; refrigerator/freezer

Storage duration: Indefinitely

Brown rice

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place; refrigerator/freezer

Storage duration: Cool, dry place or refrigerator: up to 6 months; freezer: 1 year

Comments: The oil in the bran layer quickly becomes rancid at room temperature.

Pasta

Storage: airtight container in cool, dry place

Storage duration: 1 year

Comments: After opening, transfer to airtight container.

Bread crumbs

Storage: cool, dry place or refrigerator

Storage duration: Cool dry place: 3 to 6 months; refrigerator: 2 years

Comments: To keep flavour fresh, refrigerate after opening.

Coffee

Storage: Unopened/opened airtight glass or ceramic containers in cool, dark place

Storage duration: 1 to 2 weeks

Comments: Whole beans can be frozen in small amounts for up to a month; do not refreeze — the flavour will be affected.

Sugar (brown)

Storage: airtight container in a cool place

Storage duration: 4 to 6 months

Comments: Brown sugar hardens when it dries out.

Sugar (granulated)

Storage: airtight container in a cool, dry place

Storage duration: Indefinitely

Honey

Storage: cool, dark place or best kept in the refrigerator

Storage duration: Indefinitely

Comments: If honey has crystallized, place open jar in pan of simmering water; stir honey until crystals dissolve.

Maple syrup

Storage: best kept in the refrigerator

Storage duration: Refrigerator: 1 year; freezer: indefinitely

Comments: For optimal storage, buy in glass containers only; maple syrup is subject to mould, and glass helps prevent mould formation.

Vegetable oil

Storage: cool, dark place or refrigerator

Storage duration: Cool, dark place: 3 months; refrigerator: 6 months

Comments: Refrigerated vegetable oil shouldn't be left out; frequent temperature changes aren't good for it.

Olive oil

Storage: cool, dark place or refrigerator

Storage duration: 12 to 18 months

Comments: Olive oil solidifies if refrigerated, but this does not affect its flavour.

Vinegar

Storage: cool, dark place

Storage duration: Unopened: indefinitely; opened: 6 months

Comments: Strain vinegar with added ingredients, such as herbs, into a clean bottle when vinegar level drops below ingredients.

Mayonnaise

Storage: Unopened: cool, dark place; opened: refrigerator

Storage duration: Unopened: see use-by date; opened: 2 months

Comments: In refrigerator, store in door; the oil may separate if the jar is kept in colder parts of the refrigerator.

Soy sauce

Storage: Unopened: cool, dark place; opened: refrigerator

Storage duration: 1 year

Comments: Can use for up to three years, but evaporation may darken the colour and intensify the flavour.

Worcestershire sauce

Storage: cool, dark place

Storage duration: see use by date, however 12 years

Comments: Tastes better with age because liquid evaporates and flavour intensifies.

Salsa

Storage: Unopened: cool, dark place; opened: refrigerator

Storage duration: Unopened: 1 year; opened: 2 weeks

Comments: To prevent contamination from bacteria, don't dip food into the jar; spoon from jar to serve.

Spices

Storage: airtight container in cool, dark place

Storage duration: 1 year

Comments: Date the containers when you purchase them; refrigerate red spices (e.g., paprika), poppy, and sesame seeds.

Pulses

Storage: airtight container in cool, dark place

Storage duration: Indefinitely

Nuts

Storage: Unopened: room temperature; opened: refrigerator or freezer

Storage duration: Unopened: 1 month; opened, in refrigerator or freezer: 2 to 3 months

Comments: Remember to store in its natural raw form i.e. unroasted, unsalted only

Nut meal

Storage: opened: refrigerator or freezer

Storage duration: Best not to store and grind freshly when about to use as essential fatty acid content oxidises over time, however, if opened, in refrigerator or freezer: 2 to 3 months

Nut butters

Storage: cool place, if processed; natural types must be refrigerated

Storage duration: 6 months

Comments: Gets rancid when exposed to air or heat. To determine if it's still fresh past the expiration date, smell and taste.

Eggs

Storage: In its original carton in main part of refrigerator (it's not cold enough in the door)

Storage duration: 3 to 5 weeks

Comments: If yolks and whites are separated, can be frozen up to a year!

Pre-Grated cheese

Storage: Unopened: check date on package; opened: 3 to 4 weeks

Storage duration: Unopened: check date on package; opened: 3 to 4 weeks

Potatoes

Storage: Cool, dark place; do not refrigerate: flavour will change

Storage duration: 1 month

Comments: Don't wash before storing; dampness can cause decay. Near heat and light, spuds develop a bitter flavour and last only a week.

Onions

Storage: Cool, dry, well-ventilated place, such as a basket, away from direct sunlight

Storage duration: 1 to 4 weeks

Comments: Refrigerate cut onions in tightly sealed container. If an onion has a strong odour before peeling, it may have a rotten layer.

The pantry staples

Now that your pantry has been thoroughly cleaned, let's replace it with some of the best organic/biodynamic staples:

- Fruit juice concentrates – apple, pear, Agave
- Mirin
- Miso paste – mugi, genmaicha
- Raw honey
- Sea vegetables – arame, hijiki, kombu, wakame, nori, agar agar, dulse
- Selection of cold pressed oils in dark bottles – Olive, sunflower, safflower, flaxseed, sesame
- Selection of dried fruits – fig, sultanas, apricot, raisin, prune
- Selection of dried pulses – kidney beans, haricot beans, pinto beans, navy beans, lima beans, mung beans, turtle beans, black beans, adzuki beans, broad beans, chickpeas, lentils (blue, red, brown), peas (yellow, split, black-eyed)
- Selection of grains and flours – spelt, rice, rye, oat, millet, quinoa, amaranth, corn, wheat, besam
- Selection of herbal teas – green, peppermint, lemon balm, chamomile, genmaicha, bancha, rosemary, lemongrass
- Selection of Herbs and Spices
- Selection of raw, unsalted nuts and seeds for snacks, nut-butters and nut-meals – almond, cashew, macadamia, brazil, walnut, peanut
- Selection of raw, unsalted seeds - sunflower, pumpkin, sesame, linseed
- Selection of vinegars – balsamic, rice wine, apple cider, white and red wine
- Tamari

End note

Remember, food needs to be fresh and wholesome to provide us with vital nutrients. Keep smaller quantities of ingredients to ensure that you have frequent rotation to prevent aging of food products.

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