

Spring clean your pantry

Whether your pantry storage is a cupboard or a walk-in closet, I challenge you to clean and organize this area.

Pantry items include cans, jars and pouches of shelf-stable food (a food that does not have to be refrigerated for food safety if it is unopened.) Great pantry “staples” allow you to have supplies that can be used for quick and nutritious meals or snacks.

You might have beans, broth or stock, canned or pouched meat, or canned tomatoes. Maybe you have dried fruit, canned fruits, nut butter, salsa or canned vegetables. I seem to always have cereals, grains, pasta, snacks, and condiments (because I stock up when these items are on sale). But how long is it safe to keep these food items?

The only food product with an expiration date that matters is infant formula. You should not buy or use baby formula after its “use-by” date for safety and nutritional reasons.

There is no regulated food dating system in the United States. You will see imprints such as “sell by,” “Best by,” or “Use by.” A “Sell By” date helps the store to know how long to display the product for sale (common for meat and perishable items). A “Best if used by (or before) date” is recommended for best flavor quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. For instance, dry cereal often has a “best by” imprinted date that is one year from the packing date. However, if the box or inner bag is damaged, the food will be stale much sooner than one year!

K-State Research and Extension has a free publication available from our online bookstore that provides storage guidelines for cupboard items. Visit bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu and search “MF3131” to download a free PDF.

If you discover any canned food with a sharp dent, a dent deep enough to rest a finger, severe rust pits, swollen or bulging ends or any evidence of leaking, the food is unsafe to eat and should be discarded. When in doubt, throw it out!

As you clean and organize your pantry or cupboard, make a plan to use the various food items (especially those that have been on your shelf for awhile). I have a brownie mix that could be used so I could make room for more canned fruits and vegetables.

For more resources, contact K-State Research and Extension Cowley County at the Cowley County Courthouse, weekdays 8-11:30 a.m. and 12:30- 5 p.m. at 620-221-5450.

Source: Londa Nwadike, Kansas State University and University of Missouri Extension Food Safety Specialist

Upcoming K-State Research and Extension Events

May 1 - Cowley County Health and Safety Fair, 9 a.m. - 12 p.m., Free, Ag-Business Building, Arkansas City

