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Wise Notes for Consumers

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Cleaning the Kitchen Cupboard: Toss or Save?

Have you looked — REALLY looked — at the foods in your kitchen cupboards lately? Is it time to bid some foods a fond farewell? Can you “revive” some aging foods so they still can be used? Read on for tips from Nebraska Extension specialists to help you decide whether to toss, move or try to save common kitchen cupboard foods.

The following storage tips are based on food stored at a room temperature of about 70° F. The times are those generally cited for maintaining best food quality. A range of times and the more conservative recommendations are given to allow for age of the product when purchased, how long it has been open, etc. **READ LABELS CAREFULLY** — they often contain important storage information and recommended “use by” dates.

- Baking Powder — 12 to 18 months or expiration date on container.
 - Storage Tip: Store tightly covered in a dry place. Make sure measuring utensils are dry before dipping into the container. Testing for Freshness: Mix 1 teaspoon baking powder with 1/3 cup hot water. If it foams vigorously, it still has rising power.

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- Baking Soda — 12 to 18 months or expiration date on container.
 - Storage Tip: Store tightly covered in a dry place. Make sure measuring utensils are dry before dipping them into the container. Testing for Freshness: Place 1-1/2 teaspoons in a small bowl. Add 1 tablespoon vinegar. If it fizzes, then it will still help leaven a food. If it doesn't fizz, use it as an odor catcher in the refrigerator.

- Shortening — 3 to 8 months opened; 8 to 12 months unopened
 - Storage Tip #1: Store in a tightly closed container in a cool, dark place.
 - Storage Tip #2: Times reported by shortening companies and other sources varied. For more specifics, contact the company for more information.
 - Storage Tip #3: Shortening that has been stored too long will go rancid and develop an undesirable taste and odor. If you haven't used a shortening for a while, smell it before using it in a recipe.

- Canned Foods — 1 to 2 years
 - Storage Tip #1: The Canned Food Alliance <www.mealtime.org> recommends eating canned food within 2 years of PROCESSING for best quality. Many cans will include a "for best quality use by" date stamped somewhere on the can. In a well-run and busy store there should be a fairly constant turnover of canned goods, with cans on the shelf only a short time before you purchase them, according to the Canned Food Alliance. Some products contain a code, which varies among companies, that identifies the production date. If you have a concern over how old a food is, call the company's toll-free number (if listed on the can) or write to the address on the can.

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- Storage Tip #2: Avoid refrigerating OPENED canned foods in their can. Food can develop an off-odor from the can, once opened. Transfer to another storage container.

Be sure to catch next week's column as we will feature storage tips for additional pantry items. Don't hesitate to contact the Extension office at (940) 627-3341 for further information on whether to toss, mover or try to save common kitchen cupboard foods.

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