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Shelf Life of Some Common Storage Foods

From: Geri Guidetti
Newsgroups: misc.survivalism
[Contact info in the [books section](#)]

...As far as general rules for shelf lives of common veggies and fruits is concerned, jarred foods keep at least 6 months longer than cans if stored in the dark as well as dry and cool. Glass is inert. Acid or acidified foods such as sauerkraut, apple sauce, pickled beets, tomatoes, tomato sauces, pineapple and citrus juices, etc. keep the least length of time in cans. They do interact eventually with the metal of the can. They will taste "tinny" and blacken as well. These are suggested by their mfrs. to be eaten within 18 months of the day packed--that's where the code comes in. Jars of the same products last at least 24 months from date packed. Non-acid foods in cans--corn, green beans, mixed veggies, mushrooms, potatoes, yams, asparagus, carrots, etc.-- will keep a minimum of 24 months. Beyond these dates, though the food will not have deteriorated beyond eating, there is a steady vitamin loss in percentage points each year for individual veggies and fruits. The percentage varies with the product. But they ARE still edible. The cooler/darker your storage conditions, the greater the shelf life as a rule and you can push these dates some.

Interestingly, the shelf life of evaporated milk varies with the fat content. From

my book: Skimmed evap. milk, only 9 months. Lowfat, 12 months. Regular, 15 months. Sweetened condensed, 12 mo. This, Carnation says, has to do with the stability of the milk proteins and their expected performance in the recipes people use them for. They still have nutrition but will fail performance tests in cakes, etc. The skimmed and low fat versions will also darken faster.

For the group member asking about the longevity of canned meats: Meat, salmon, stews and tuna--24 months recommended shelf life. Again, you can extend that with no danger if unopened but with fewer intact nutrients.

Dating Codes Used by Some canners and Packers

From: Geri Guidetti

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Tammy Barette wrote:

> I was a little shocked to learn that MREs are expected to be
>usable for only a 5-7 year period. I routinely keep store bought
>canned goods for more than two years, regardless of their expiration
>date. So far I have never encountered a bulging can or food which has
>a funny odor, and I have never experienced food poisoning.

> Just how long will a canned meat product stay fresh? Vegetable
product?

> (Today was a wonderful lesson in food shortages -- we're expecting
>a whopping 4" of snow tonight and the bread shelves are empty at the
>stores in large areas of Ohio.)

I will do my best to answer. First, individual companies make up their own codes to be stamped on the tops of cans and jars. I finally got disgusted enough trying to decipher them when doing research for my book that I called a few big food corporations and asked "what's up?" with these coding systems. Carnation Foods was one and deciphered their evaporated milk stamps--example: 4145MC 202S. The only thing important to us lies in the first four digits. The 4 stands for 1994, the year the milk was packed. The 14 represents the 14th day of...the 5, the 5th month, May of the year. This can was packed May 14, 1994, well past their recommended shelf life. The rest of the letters and digits represent plant and lot numbers as I recall.

Now let's make things more confusing: A can of store brand cranberry sauce is stamped NOV 98 MO 652. This firm stamps the pull date, or date after which they can't guarantee top quality. Much more direct for our purposes. A jar of mustard, another company: 696270 Packed June of 96 and should have a shelf life of at least 2 years if packed in a cool dark place. Remember this is a glass jar, not an acid-sensitive tin can. More on that in a minute. A jar of tomato sauce, not a can: OCT98 1003....etc. Bless them, too, an easily read code that suggests it's at top condition until Oct. of '98 if kept in good storage conditions.

In a nutshell, my observations have been that more and more mfrs. are beginning to use more user-friendly codes, but the funny business still persists for many. On such cans, like the evap. milk, read the can label carefully to locate a consumer hotline or customer service no. Call it and ask for a translation and then register your dissatisfaction with their coding system. Tell them you and your food storing friends won't be able to buy their products if you are to be kept in the dark concerning expiration dates, etc. They WILL listen. BTW, my discussions with Carnation disclosed that the grocery store, a large, reputable chain, had sold me evap. milk two years beyond the recommended storage date! Carnation called the store to tell them to pull it off the shelves and then sent me two coupons for free cans for the ones bought past date...

Captain Dave's Editorial Note: Be especially careful when buying sale items. Sometimes stores will hold a sale when foods are getting near their expiration date. Also, check dates on infant formula! Several leading chain stores were caught by a TV investigative program with old formula on their shelves.

[Next](#) | [Previous](#) | [Top](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Search](#) | [Home](#)