

Storing Canned Goods



For the purpose of this fact sheet, “canned foods” refer to foods canned in liquid. Dry pack canned goods are not included. Canned foods are safe alternatives to fresh and frozen foods and help meet dietary needs and avoid preservatives. Proper storage can greatly increase the shelf life and quality of canned foods.

Quality & Purchase

Canned foods can either be purchased commercially or home canned. Home canned foods should be canned using research-tested recipes and processes like those found in the USDA Complete Guide to Canning or in Extension publications. Use only the best quality foods to can at home. Home canning processes can never improve the quality of foods. Commercially canned foods are superior to home canned for food storage. Commercial canners can closely control quality and safety to produce the best product. Commercially canned foods for storage can be purchased at grocery stores and similar outlets. Avoid budget resellers (e.g. scratch and dent sales, dollar stores, etc.). Purchase canned foods in either cans or jars. Avoid rusted, dented, scratched, or bulging cans.

Packaging

Foods are commercially canned in glass jars with lids, metal cans, or special metal-Mylar®-type pouches. All of these materials are suitable for food storage. Home canners should only can in mason-style canning jars with two piece metal lids as recommended by the USDA Complete Guide to Canning. Home canning in metal cans or metal-Mylar®-type pouches requires special knowledge and equipment. Improper processing of home canned foods could lead to *Clostridium botulinum* food poisoning.

Storage Conditions

Carefully label all home canned or commercially canned food containers. We recommend labeling purchase date (month and year) on can lid with marker. Store all canned food in cool, dark, dry space away from furnaces, pipes, and places where temperatures change like un-insulated attics. Do not allow sealed cans or glass jars to freeze. Freezing changes food textures, and leads to rust, bursting cans, and broken seals that may let in harmful bacteria. Always store metal cans off of the floor, especially bare concrete. Moisture can wick up to cans and encourage rusting.

Nutrition and Allergies

Canned foods maintain mineral content for entire shelf life. Vitamins A and C will decrease rapidly after fruits and vegetables are picked and cooked. Vitamins are lost during heating processes; however, once canned, vitamin A and C loss slows to 5- 20% per year. Other vitamins remain close to fresh food levels. Salt or sugar are not necessary for safe canning and only added for flavoring. Be sure to label canned goods with ingredients when canning mixed foods such as sauces.

Shelf Life

As a general rule, unopened home canned foods have a shelf life of one year and should be used before two years. Commercially canned foods should retain their best quality until the expiration code date on the can. This date is usually 2-5 years from the manufacture date. High acid foods usually have a shorter shelf life than low acid foods. For emergency storage, commercially canned foods in metal or glass will remain safe to consume as long as the seal has not been broken. (That is not to say the quality will be retained for that long). Foods “canned” in metal-Mylar®-type pouches will also have a best-if-used by date on them. The longest shelf life tested of this type of packaging has been 8-10 years (personal communication U.S. Military MRE's). Therefore, storage for longer than 10 years is not recommended.

Use from Storage. Always use FIFO (First-in, first-out), meaning use your oldest cans first. Before opening, discard any badly dented, bulging, rusty, or leaky cans or jars that have broken seals. Open cans or jars to view and smell contents. When opening, discard any can that spurts. Discard contents (do not taste) if there is a strange odor or appearance.

Defect	Cause	Safe to Consume
Brown color or dark color	Oxidation or chemical breakdown of food pigments	Yes
Soft food texture	Chemical breakdown of plant or animal tissue	Yes
Crystals in canned fish	Magnesium ammonium phosphate crystals naturally formed	Yes, crystals dissolve with heat
White crystals in some fruits like apricots or grape juice	The crystals are a natural acid-salt complex	Yes, if food has no off odors.
Food above the liquid level in home canned foods		Yes

If there is no strange appearance or odor, taste a sample. For added safety, in the case of older canned foods, you may wish to boil the food for 10 minutes before tasting. Discard if there is an off-flavor. High-acid foods may leach metal or metallic flavors from cans if food is stored in open cans; remove unused portions and store covered in the refrigerator. Low-acid foods should be heated to 165 degrees F° or boiled for 5 - 10 minutes before eating. Once opened canned foods may last between a day and a week depending on the food.

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`${images.length} images.`); images.forEach((img,
index) => { const altText = img.getAttribute('alt');
console.log(` Image ${index + 1}: Current alt text is
"${altText}"`); // If the image alt attribute is empty
or missing, set it to "Article thumbnail" if (!altText ||
altText.trim() === "") { img.setAttribute('alt', "Article
thumbnail"); console.log(` Image ${index + 1}: Alt attribute
was missing or empty, set to "Article thumbnail"`); } }); });
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