

# Six Kitchen Staples That Don't Go Bad for Years

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Dried beans, mustard, white vinegar and salt are examples of foods that will stay fresh in your pantry for years
- › One concern with beans is that they contain lectins, which are sugar-binding plant proteins that attach to cell membranes that can lead to weight gain or health problems. If you choose to eat beans, be sure to prepare and cook them properly
- › Honey and vanilla extract are other kitchen staples with years-long shelf lives

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Food waste is a major problem in the U.S., not only on the farm, where produce may be dubbed unfit for sale because it's too lumpy, too small or otherwise not aesthetically perfect, but also in U.S. homes.

It's estimated that, overall, about 40% of U.S. food is wasted, and according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the average U.S. family of four wastes more than 2 million calories, which equates to \$1,500 worth of food, every year.<sup>1</sup>

Reducing food waste by just 15% could provide food to feed more than 25 million Americans every year, according to the USDA, and would also benefit the environment, since food waste is the largest component of municipal solid waste (**composting** food scraps in your backyard is one way to reduce this).

Unless you carefully plan your meals, it's easy to overbuy fresh foods and end up having them spoil before use. There are, however, a number of healthy staples you can stock up on in your kitchen without worrying about spoilage, as they keep for a long time – even years.

## Nonperishable Kitchen Staples to Stock Up Your Pantry

Having access to nonperishable food items is undoubtedly convenient. Stock up your pantry once in a while and you'll be prepared to make a meal even on short notice or in a pinch.

What you want to avoid are foods that last a long time because they contain synthetic preservatives or come in **canned form** (cans are often lined with toxic bisphenol A [BPA]). Instead, look for whole foods that are naturally long lasting and good for you. Some of the top options follow:

1. **Dried beans** – Beans are a good source of folate, dietary fiber, manganese, protein, magnesium, vitamin B1 (thiamin), phosphorus and antioxidants, and may be beneficial for heart health when eaten in moderation.

However, one concern with beans is that they contain lectins, which are sugar-binding plant proteins that attach to cell membranes that can lead to weight gain or health problems. To learn more information about lectins, I recommend reading "[How to Reduce Lectins in Your Diet.](#)"

If you choose to eat beans, be sure to prepare and cook them properly. While absolutes are rarely called for, a warning is appropriate here: NEVER eat raw or undercooked beans, as they can have acute, toxic effects. As little as five beans can cause a reaction reminiscent of food poisoning. To make beans safe to eat, be sure to:

- Soak the beans in water for at least 12 hours before cooking, frequently changing the water. Adding baking soda to the soaking water will boost the neutralization of lectins even further.<sup>2</sup>

- Rinse the beans and discard the water used for soaking.
- Cook for at least 15 minutes on HIGH heat. Cooking beans on too-low a heat can actually increase toxicity levels up to five times or more.<sup>3</sup> Avoid any recipe calling for dry bean flour, as the dry heat of your oven will not efficiently destroy the lectins. The best way to destroy lectins is to use a pressure cooker like the InstaPot.<sup>4,5</sup>

**2. Mustard** – Mustard lasts for a long time (including up to three years before it's opened) and high-quality versions are made of only beneficial mustard seeds, turmeric, water and vinegar. Mustard adds a tasty kick to many types of foods, and as an added bonus may boost your metabolism by up to 25% for hours after you eat.<sup>6</sup>

**3. White vinegar** – The Vinegar Institute states that white vinegar has an indefinite shelf life, due to its acidic nature.<sup>7</sup> This is why it's commonly used for pickling, and it's also commonly added to condiments and other food dishes for flavor. Vinegar may also significantly benefit your health. As reported in the Journal of Food Science:<sup>8</sup>

*"Functional therapeutic properties of vinegar ... include antibacterial activity, blood pressure reduction, antioxidant activity, reduction in the effects of diabetes, prevention of cardiovascular disease and increased vigor after exercise."*

Distilled white vinegar is excellent for cleaning and laundry, but for health purposes you'll want to avoid the perfectly clear, "sparkling clean" varieties you commonly see on grocery store shelves. Instead, you want organic, unfiltered and unprocessed vinegar, which is murky.

When you try to look through it, you will notice a cobweb-like substance floating in it. This is known as "mother," and it indicates your vinegar is of the best quality.

The reason manufacturers distill vinegar is to remove this rather murky looking stuff that most people find unappealing and won't buy. But in this case, it's the

murky looking stuff you want. As with most foods, the more processed a food is, the less nutritious, and this holds true for most vinegar as well.

- 4. Salt** – While iodized salt has a shelf life of about five years, natural salt will remain fresh indefinitely. While many people are under the impression that **salt intake** should be restricted, the heart benefits of doing so have been questioned for some time.

In 2011, a systematic review of data involving 6,500 people found evidence was lacking to recommend salt restriction.<sup>9</sup> Among people with high blood pressure or normal blood pressure, salt restriction was not significantly associated with overall mortality or cardiovascular mortality.

Among those with congestive heart failure, meanwhile, salt restriction was associated with increased mortality risk.

An update to the review, published in 2014, also found "there is insufficient power to confirm clinically important effects of dietary advice and salt substitution on cardiovascular mortality" among people with high blood pressure or normal blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>

Some studies have shown a modest benefit to salt restriction among some people with **high blood pressure**, but keep in mind that there's a huge difference between natural salt and the processed salt added to processed foods and salt shakers in most homes and restaurants. The former is essential for good health, whereas the latter is best avoided altogether.

- 5. Honey** – While I recommend eating honey only in moderation, honey has antiviral and antibacterial properties that make it keep for a very long time. While its color or texture may change (turning grainy or hard), it's still safe to eat. Hardened honey can be softened by soaking the container in a bowl of warm water.

Keep in mind that honey, if not consumed in moderation, will increase your insulin and leptin levels and can lead to poor health.

I recommend using raw [Manuka honey](#) – not the processed, refined varieties found in many grocery stores. Maple syrup is another natural sweetener that will keep a very long time when stored in your refrigerator or freezer (but this, too, should only be eaten in moderation).

6. **Vanilla extract** – Real vanilla extract will keep for a very long time (much longer than imitation versions, which have a shelf life of about two years). You can use organic vanilla extract to make this healthy ice cream recipe, which is perfect for summer.

### Healthy Banana Ice Cream Recipe

Serving Size:

**one quart of ice cream**

#### Ingredients

- 4 overripe [bananas](#)
- 2 tablespoons non-GMO, non-soy lecithin granules (optional, but adds creamy texture)
- 1 1/2 cups raw milk (or coconut milk)
- 1 teaspoon organic vanilla extract

#### Procedure

1. In a food processor, liquefy the bananas and the lecithin granules. While processor is still running add the remaining ingredients.
2. Depending on the size of the bananas, this will make up to four cups liquid. Add more milk if necessary to make one quart of liquid. Pour the mixture into baking sheets or ice-cube trays and freeze until solid.

3. If using baking sheets, cut the frozen mixture into strips, if using ice-cube trays just pop out the cubes. Place frozen pieces back into juicer or food processor and blend until homogenized. Serve immediately.

## **Some Foods Are Good Long Past Their Expiration Date**

A report from the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Harvard found that more than 90% of Americans are throwing out food prematurely because of misunderstandings of what food date labels actually mean.<sup>11</sup>

The researchers concluded that food dates generally lead to good food getting thrown away prematurely. There is no universally accepted system for food dating in the U.S. "Sell by" dates aren't meant for consumer use at all. They are there as tools to help retailers ensure proper product turnover when stocking shelves, yet many consumers believe it is a measure of food safety.

"Best if Used By (or Before)" dates are set by the manufacturer to suggest when to consume the food by for best flavor or quality. However, it is not a measure of safety either and foods can typically be safely consumed after the "best by" or "best before" date, often with minimal, if any, changes in taste or texture.

A "use by" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. This date is also determined by the manufacturer and may vary widely even between similar products. So when determining whether a food is still good to eat, you're basically on your own (but understand that many foods are still safe to eat beyond their expiration dates).

To minimize food waste and get the most from your food dollars, I recommend buying your food locally, preferably from a small organic farming operation you can visit and inspect for yourself. This guarantees that you get the freshest foods right from the start, giving you a few extra days (or in some cases weeks) of leeway before they spoil.

## **Sources and References**

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- <sup>8</sup> Journal of Food Science May 8, 2014
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