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**Spring Cleaning in the Kitchen**

Spring is fast approaching and that often brings thoughts of spring cleaning. Including the kitchen in that seasonal process is important, but there’s no reason to wait until spring, according to Karen Blakeslee, who noted kitchens typically get a work-out during the holidays and on Super Bowl Sunday. Blakeslee is a Food Safety Specialist with K-State Research and Extension.

She suggests removing all items from one or two cupboards at a time before washing the cupboard, inside and outside.

“Allow time for the cupboards to air dry,” said Blakeslee, who advised checking clean, dry cupboards for cracks or holes that will need to be caulked to protect foods from insect damage.

Re-usable washable shelf-liners should be washed and air-dried or replaced, she said.

Blakeslee recommended discarding food products with signs of insect or other damage, such as a dented can or a cracked glass jar.

The food scientist also advises sorting products by type and date, and noted that non-perishable foods will typically carry a “Use-By” date to indicate a date to which a product is expected to retain food quality, flavor and texture.

Look for dates on canned fruits, vegetables or soups, dried food products such as fruit or packaged pastas, and soft packs, such as tuna or sauce mix, said Blakeslee, who is the Rapid Response coordinator with K-State Research and Extension.

When returning food to the clean cupboard – or restocking – she advises placing the newest foods behind older foods that should be used first.

Evaluate spices and flavorings that typically lose food quality after opening. Like most foods, spices should be stored in a cool, dry place, said Blakeslee, who advised using spices within six months and replacing them after a year.

Since dates are not always as obvious on small packages she encourages consumers to buy smaller quantities of seldom-used spices and to label and date them after purchase.

Don’t confuse “Use-By” dates with “Sell-By” dates, which serve as a guide for grocers stocking fresh food products and removing out-of-date products from shelves, she said.

Blakeslee offered an explanation of dates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service:

* A “**Sell-By”** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale; consumers should buy the product before the date expires.
* A “**Best if Used By (or Before)”** date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
* A “**Use-By”** date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
* **“Closed or coded dates”** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

During kitchen cleaning, the food scientist also recommends:

\* Store pots, pans, or dishes, rather than food, near warm locations like heating vents.

\* Store seldom-used items, such as holiday cookie cutters, in out-of-the way or seldom-used cupboards, such as the small cupboard over the refrigerator.

\* Group packages such as yeast and seasoning mixes in a small basket or box for easy access.

\* Store frequently-used items within easy reach in areas between the shoulders and knees.

\* Group baking items such as flour, sugar, baking powder, bowls, and spatulas in a baking center.

\* Move picnic or tailgating gear and seasonal tableware to another location.

\* Sort utensils and choose one or two favorites of each type; pass still usable items on to students, or others who are setting up a household, or donate to a thrift shop.

\* Organize smaller gadgets by type in baskets or boxes within a drawer.

\* Designate a cupboard close to the sink and dishwasher to store dishes, table and glassware.

\* Empty the refrigerator periodically and discard leftovers or other foods that are past their prime. If possible, remove shelves and drawers for cleaning. Clean the exterior with warm, soapy water and vacuum dust and dirt from under the appliance.

Blakeslee stresses the importance of reading and following manufacturer’s recommendations for cleaning appliances, cooktops, countertops and cabinets.

More information on food storage is available in the guide, [“Cupboard, Approximate Storage Times”](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/L806.pdf) available through K-State Research and Extension’s Southwind District offices. For other questions about foods or nutrition, contact Kathy in the Iola office at 620-365-2242 or by email at kmcewan@ksu.edu.