

News Column for use week of Feb. 10, 2020

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Now is a Good Time to Clean the Kitchen

Kitchens typically get a work-out during the holidays and on Super Bowl Sunday. Since those big food events are past, now is a great time to choose an inside day or two to clean the kitchen.

I suggest 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, and then check the clean, dry cupboards for cracks or holes that will need to be caulked to protect foods from insect or rodent damage. Wash re-usable shelf-liners and dry completely before replacing, or replace with shelf-liner of your choice.

Discarding food products with any signs of insect or other damage, such as a dented can or a cracked glass jar. Sort products by type and date, and look for 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, as well. When returning food to the clean cupboard – or restocking –place 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, used within six months for best quality and replaced after a year. Since dates are not always as obvious on small packages it's wise 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"Use-By" dates with "Sell-By" dates, which serve as a guide for grocers stocking fresh food products and removing out-of-date products from shelves.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service, this is what dates mean:

- 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, I also recommend:

* 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.

Always remember to read and follow manufacturer's recommendations for cleaning appliances, cooktops, countertops and cabinets.

More information on food storage is available in the guide, "Cupboard, Approximate Storage Times" available through K-State Research and Extension's Southwind District offices and online at www.southwind.ksu.edu. For other questions about foods or nutrition, contact Kathy at 620-365-2242 or by email at kmcewan@ksu.edu.