

The Shelf-Life Periodic Table

Nothing lasts forever...except maybe nail-polish remover and mayonnaise (yes, mayonnaise). A handy, who-knew **guide to expiration dates** for 77 foods, beauty products, and household goods

CERTAIN ITEMS in your house practically scream “toss me” when their prime has passed. That mysterious extra white layer on the Cheddar? A sure sign it needs to be put out of its misery. Chunky milk? Down the drain it goes.

But what about that jar of olives or Maraschino cherries that has resided in your refrigerator since before the birth of your kindergartner? Or the innumerable nonedibles lurking deep within your cabinets and closets: stockpiled shampoo and toothpaste, seldom-used silver polish? How do you know when their primes have passed?

With help from experts and product manufacturers, *Real Simple* has compiled a periodic table of expiration dates (see following pages), kind of like the one you remember from high school chemistry class. Don't worry—you won't be tested. But you may be a little surprised.

“You can tell how long a couple has been married by whether they are on their first, second, or third bottle of Tabasco.”

Bruce R. Bye, former director of brand management, Durkee Famous Foods

CAN YOU GUESS HOW LONG THESE ITEMS ARE GOOD FOR?
Test your shelf-life IQ. See page 151 for the answers.



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Use It or Lose It?

The expiration dates in this chart are offered as a rough guideline. The shelf lives of most products depend upon how you treat them. Edibles, unless otherwise indicated, should be stored in a cool, dry place. (With any food, of course, use common sense.) Household cleaners also do best in a dry place with a stable temperature. After the dates shown, beauty and cleaning products are probably still safe but may be less effective.

- = FOOD
- = HOUSEHOLD PRODUCT
- = BEAUTY PRODUCT
- U** = UNOPENED
- O** = OPENED OR USED
- U/O** = UNOPENED OR OPENED

Pb Peanut butter, natural U/O: 9 months.	Jf Peanut butter, processed (Jif) U: 2 years. O: 6 months; refrigerate after 3 months.						
Hny Honey U/O: Indefinite shelf life.	Bsg Brown sugar U/O: Indefinite shelf life, stored in a moistureproof container in a cool, dry place.	Wr Worcestershire sauce U: 5 to 10 years.* O: 2 years.	Kof Coffee, instant U: Up to 2 years. O: Up to 1 month.	Cof Coffee, canned ground U: 2 years. O: 1 month refrigerated.	Caf Coffee, gourmet Beans: 3 weeks in paper bag, longer in vacuum-seal bag.* Ground: 1 week in sealed container.		
Mu Mustard U/O: 2 years.*	Oil Olive oil U/O: 2 years from manufacture date.*	Tb Tabasco U/O: 5 years, stored in a cool, dry place.	Sld Salad dressing, bottled U: 12 months after "best by" date. O: 9 months refrigerated.	Ch Chocolate (Hershey bar) U/O: 1 year from production date.	T Tea bags (Lipton) U/O: Use within 2 years of opening the package.	Mml Marshmallows U: 40 weeks. O: 3 months.	Wdx Windex U/O: 2 years.
Kp Ketchup U: 1 year.* O: 4 to 6 months.*	Vgr Vinegar U/O: 42 months.	Tu Tuna, canned U: 1 year from purchase date. O: 3 to 4 days, not stored in can.	Ma Maraschino cherries U: 3 to 4 years. O: 2 weeks at room temperature; 6 months refrigerated.	Stk Steak sauce U/O: 33 months.*	Sd Soda, regular U: In cans or glass bottles, 9 months from "best by" date. O: Doesn't spoil, but taste is affected.	Pwr Protein bars (PowerBars) U: 10 to 12 months. Check "best by" date on the package.	Wp Wood polish (Pledge) U/O: 2 years.
Myo Mayonnaise U: Indefinitely. O: 2 to 3 months from "purchase by" date.*	Soy Soy sauce, bottled U: 2 years. O: 3 months.*	J Juice, bottled (apple or cranberry) U: 8 months from production date. O: 7 to 10 days.	Olv Olives, jarred (green with pimento) U: 3 years. O: 3 months.	Fd Frozen dinners U: 12 to 18 months.	Dsd Diet soda (and soft drinks in plastic bottles) U: 3 months from "best by" date. O: See Sd, above.	Ps Dried pasta U/O: 12 months.	Mr Mr. Clean U/O: 2 years.
Pkl Pickles U: 18 months. O: No conclusive data. Discard if slippery or excessively soft.	Wn Wine (red, white) U: 3 years from vintage date; 20 to 100 years for fine wines. O: 1 week refrigerated and corked.	Br Beer U: 4 months.	Pn Peanuts U: 1 to 2 years unless frozen or refrigerated. O: 1 to 2 weeks in airtight container.	Fv Frozen vegetables U: 18 to 24 months. O: 1 month.	Mpl Maple syrup, real or imitation U/O: 1 year.	Ri Rice, white U/O: 2 years from date on box or date of purchase.	Mp Metal polish (silver, copper, brass) U/O: At least 3 years.

*After this time, color or flavor may be affected, but the product is still generally safe to consume.

AND THE ANSWERS ARE...



REGULAR SODA, in a can: 9 months from “best by” date.
DIET SODA: 3 months.



WINDEX: 2 years.



KETCHUP, unopened: 1 year.



LIPSTICK: 2 years.

Wnd

Wash 'n Dri moist wipes
U/O: 2 years.
O: Good until dried out.

		Pa Paint U: Up to 10 years. O: 2 to 5 years.	Np Nail polish U/O: 1 year.†	Fn Foundation, oil-based U/O: 2 years.† Water-based U/O: 3 years.†	Bdl Body lotion U/O: 3 years.	Bg Bath gel, body wash U/O: 3 years.†	Mw Mouthwash U/O: Three years from manufacture date.†
Bl Bleach U/O: 3 to 6 months.	Ld Liquid dish detergent U/O: 1 year.	Spr Spray paint U/O: 2 to 3 years.	Npr Nail-polish remover U/O: Lasts indefinitely.	Ls Lipstick U/O: 2 years.	Sh Shampoo U/O: 2 to 3 years.	Ba Bath oil U/O: 1 year.	Ws Tooth-whitening strips U/O: 13 months.
Ll Liquid laundry detergent U: 9 months to 1 year. O: 6 months.	Pl Powdered laundry detergent U: 9 months to 1 year. O: At least 6 months.	Mtr Motor oil U: 2 to 5 years. O: 3 months.	Pfm Perfume U/O: 1 to 2 years.	Lb Lip balm U: 5 years. O: 1 to 5 years.	C Conditioner U/O: 2 to 3 years.	Bsp Bar soap U/O: 18 months to 3 years.	Shv Shaving cream U/O: 2 years or more.
Pd Powdered dish detergent U/O: 1 year.	Mg Miracle Gro, liquid O: 3 to 8 years. Water-soluble U/O: Indefinite.	Ant Antifreeze, premixed U/O: 1 to 5 years. Concentrate U/O: Indefinite.	Msc Mascara U: 2 years. O: 3 to 4 months.	Eyc Eye cream U: 3 years. O: 1 year.	Hs Hair spray U/O: 2 to 3 years.	D Deodorant U: 2 years. O: 1 to 2 years. For antiperspirants, see expiration date.	Ra Rubbing alcohol U/O: At least 3 years.
Aer Air freshener, aerosol U/O: 2 years.	Bt Batteries, alkaline 7 years. Lithium 10 years.	Fx Fire extinguisher, rechargeable Service or replace every 6 years. Nonrechargeable 12 years.	Bb Body bleaches and depilatories U: 2 years. O: 6 months.	Fl Face lotion U/O: With SPF, see expiration date. All others, at least 3 years.	Hg Hair gel U/O: 2 to 3 years.		

† For beauty products, all dates are from the manufacture date, which is either displayed on the packaging or can be obtained by calling the manufacturer’s customer-service number.