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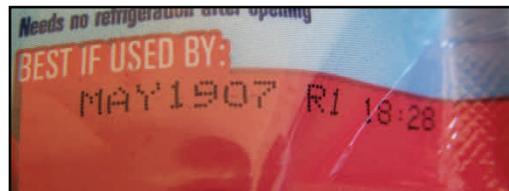
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## Deciphering Dates on Food Labels



Wasted food is increasing because consumers are confused about what dates on foods really mean. Do they indicate a food safety issue or food quality issue?

Product dating is only required by Federal law on infant formula. Otherwise, it is voluntary. Some states require dates on some foods, some do not. This adds to the confusion.

In most cases, keeping food after the date on the package can be safe, but the quality diminishes. Some examples include staling, flavor loss, off flavors develop, color changes, and more.

"Open dating" is an actual date to tell the store how long a product can be displayed for sale. It is not a safety date.

Examples are "use by" and "sell by" dates. These are used on perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products. After those dates, the food should still be safe a few days, but the quality will diminish. These foods could be cooked or frozen to extend their life.

"Closed or coded" dating refers to packing numbers and information used by the manufacturer. These are found on shelf-stable boxed or canned foods. These codes help manufacturers track the food through the food handling system. The code typically indicates the date the food was manufactured.

In all cases, how a food is stored will affect the true shelf life. Storage temperature, light exposure, humidity and other factors will shorten shelf life.

Learn more about food dating at <http://1.usa.gov/126z3ck>.

## Are Mini Pumpkins Edible?

It's pumpkin season and the sizes and varieties are many. Mini pumpkins can brighten small spaces and corners. They are also edible.

Mini pumpkins can be

baked or cooked like other winter squash. Use them as individual baking shells for pudding or stuffing. They can be serving dishes for cranberry sauce. The 'Spooktacular' variety can be used in

pies or tarts. The seeds in pumpkins can be toasted for a healthy snack.

Source: <http://bit.ly/1eUG36R>

[www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3521.ashx](http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3521.ashx)

## Preserving Mashed or Pureed Winter Squash

Winter squash, including pumpkins, will soon be harvested. But home canning of mashed or pureed squash is not a safe practice. This includes pumpkin butter.

These are low acid vegetables which, when mashed or pureed, become very dense and difficult for home canners to heat to the prop-

er temperature to kill *C. botulinum* bacteria. These foods also have high water activity levels that can also support bacteria growth.

What can be done? The best option for preserving mashed squash or pumpkin is freezing. The only option for canning is to cut the flesh of squash into cubes and process in

a pressure canner in pints or quarts. Canning directions can be found on the [National Center for Home Food Preservation website](#).

Source: [http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/pumpkin\\_butter.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/uga/pumpkin_butter.html)



Winter squash can be stored as is for a few months. See <http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc2569.ashx>.



Photo: [www.ucanr.edu](http://www.ucanr.edu)

## Pumpkin Popularity

Pumpkins have been dubbed “the new bacon” of trendy foods. Why? They are versatile and useful beyond Halloween.

Forget pie! Pumpkin is an ingredient in soup, ravioli,

cheesecake, bread, cookies, coffee, and more. Simply roasting pumpkin slices with olive oil, salt and pepper adds an easy, delicious side dish to meals.

Pumpkin colors range from creamy white to orange including red-orange, green with yellow stripes, and slate-blue.

Source: <http://bit.ly/GzRrq0>

## Safe Holiday Food Preparation

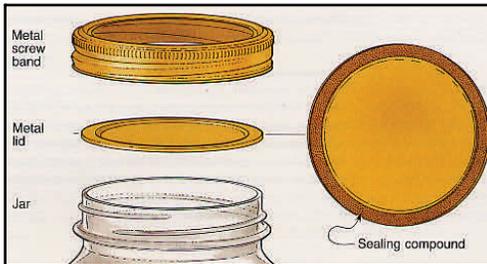
Turkey is the star main dish on many holiday dinner tables. Handling and preparing it safely can help make holidays even happier. Here are some resources for turkey and other food preparation in English and Spanish.

- [Let's Talk Turkey and more](#)
- [Stuffing and Food Safety](#)
- [Cooking for Groups](#)
- [Holiday or Party Buffets](#)
- [Top Holiday Resources](#)



More fact sheets on food safety can be found at <http://1.usa.gov/16hukdM>.

## Problems with Canning Lids



Several questions have been received regarding problems with certain "off-brand" canning lids. Examples of problems include not sealing, coming unsealed over time, and buckling especially during pressure processing. Here are some reminders to help insure good lid performance.

**For best results, use the same brand of lids and jars. Mixing lid and jar manufacturers may result in lid failure.**

- Only use lids once. Never use lids that are dented, deformed, or with other visible defects. Unused lids can work well for at least five years.
- Heat lids in simmering, not boiling, water to soften the rubber seal.
- Tighten rings on the jars "finger tight". Over tightening lids can lead to buckling and seal failure.
- Do not retighten rings on jars or press down on the lids after processing. As jars cool, the food in the jar contracts, pulling the lid firmly onto the jar rim.



Source: [http://nchfp.uqa.edu/how/general/recomm\\_jars\\_lids.html](http://nchfp.uqa.edu/how/general/recomm_jars_lids.html)

## Don't Try This at Home...Ever!

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline helps answer questions from consumers each day. Here's a situation they shared recently about cooking turkey entitled:

"Thanksgiving Funny: Taking Your Turkey to the Cleaners."

"One caller didn't have an oven bag, so she wrapped her turkey in a dry cleaner's bag. It

melted all over the turkey. We advised her to throw the turkey away due to chemical contamination!"

Source: USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline



**Photo courtesy USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline**



## "Kneadless" Breadmaking

Once the original way to make homemade bread, "kneadless" breadmaking has become popular for making fresh bread with minimal effort. Call it the "let-it-sit-and-ready-itself" approach. So what is it?

"Kneadless" breads are not physically kneaded, by hand or machine. The dough is prepared, then allowed to rise slowly in the refrigerator. The bubbling action of yeast fermentation moves and shifts dough particles to knead the dough. Given enough time, the dough may have more gluten development than traditionally kneaded dough. In physical kneading, many bakers don't knead long enough to get proper gluten development.

For other information on "kneadless" breads, see [www.breadworld.com/KneadlesslySimple.aspx](http://www.breadworld.com/KneadlesslySimple.aspx).



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## Controlling Pantry Pests



A number of insects, commonly referred to as pantry or kitchen pests, infest dry or stored food products in the home. Infestations may be noted when these insects are found in some product, but more commonly when the adults are seen crawling or flying about the kitchen or pantry. Body fragments, frass (insect excrement) or off-odor may indicate hidden or past infestations.



Infestations may develop whenever stored foods are kept for long periods (60 days or more). Stored food insects, if given enough time, can penetrate any packaging except glass and metal. Infestations can start in the home, store, warehouse, mill, processing plant or in transit.

Keep pantry and cupboard shelves clean. Remove crumbs and spilled food often. Store foods in closed glass, plastic or metal containers. Mason jars are excellent storage containers.

For more information, see "Controlling Stored-Food Insects" at <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/mf2270.pdf>



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On the Web at  
[www.rrc.ksu.edu](http://www.rrc.ksu.edu)



## Cleaning and Storing Canners

As canning season winds down, it's time to clean and store the equipment for next year. Here's some tips for pressure canners.



- Clean the vent and safety valve with a pipe cleaner or small piece of cloth.
- Check the gasket for cracks and food debris.
- If the inside of canner has darkened, fill it above the

darkened line with a mixture of 1 tablespoon cream of tartar to each quart of water. Place the canner on the stove, heat water to a boil, and boil covered until the dark deposits disappear. Sometimes stubborn deposits may require the addition of more cream of tartar. Empty the canner and wash it with hot soapy water, rinse and dry.

For more information, see [http://nchfp.uga.edu/tips/fall/store\\_canning\\_supplies.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/tips/fall/store_canning_supplies.html)