Food Safety Questions About Commercially-Canned Food

USDA/FSIS provides this chart on storing canned foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD</th>
<th>STORAGE ON SHELF</th>
<th>STORAGE AFTER OPENING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-acid canned goods. Examples: canned meat and poultry, stew, soups (except tomato), spaghetti (noodle and pasta) products, potatoes, corn, carrots, spinach, beans, beets, peas and pumpkin.</td>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>3 to 4 days in the refrigerator</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-acid canned goods. Examples: juices (tomato, orange, lemon, and grapefruit), tomatoes, grapefruit, pineapple, apples and apple products, mixed fruit, peaches, pears, plums, all berries, pickles, sauerkraut and foods treated with vinegar-based sauces or dressings like German potato salad and sourbraten.</td>
<td>12 to 18 months</td>
<td>5 to 7 days in the refrigerator</td>
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Commercially-canned foods are convenient as they require no refrigeration to keep their contents safe. Their nutritional value is comparable to other forms of food such as frozen and fresh. In some cases, it may be higher. Following are answers to questions we commonly receive at the Extension office about canned foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety & Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS).

Will Commercially Canned Foods Last Forever?

Commercial canning is done under tightly-controlled conditions — careful sanitation and the necessary time and temperature under pressure, but there are still limits to how long it will preserve food. There are several factors that limit the shelf life of canned foods. First, cans can rust over time. Shipping accidents, where cans fall and dent or are crushed, also cause container problems. Then there’s can corrosion. In canned foods, but especially in high-acid foods like canned tomatoes, natural chemicals in the food continually react with the container. Over several years, this can cause taste and texture changes, and eventually lower the nutritional value of the food.

High temperatures (over 100°F) are harmful to canned goods too. The risk of spoilage jumps sharply as storage temperatures rise. In fact, canned goods designed for use in the tropics are specially manufactured. Store canned foods and other shelf stable products in a cool, dry place. Never put them above or beside stoves, under the sink, in a damp garage or basement, or any place exposed to high or low temperature extremes. Temperatures below 85°F are best. Check your pantry every few weeks and use canned goods you have had on hand for awhile. Don’t purchase bulging, rusted, leaking or deeply dented cans.

After Opening Canned Foods, is it Safe to Refrigerate the Unused Food in the Can? Yes. Unused portions of canned food may be refrigerated in the can, but to preserve optimum quality and flavor, place the unused portion in a glass or plastic storage container.

Is it Safe to Use Rusted Canned Foods? Discard heavily rusted cans. Cans heavily rusted can have tiny holes in them, allowing bacteria to enter. Surface rust you can remove by rubbing with your finger or a paper towel is not serious. You can keep these canned foods. If you open the cans and there is any rust inside, do not use the food. Rust (oxidized iron) is not safe to eat.

Is it Safe to Use Food From Dented Cans? If a can containing food has a small dent, but is otherwise in good shape, the food should be safe to eat. Discard deeply dented cans. A deep dent is one you can lay your finger into. Deep dents often have sharp points. A sharp dent on either the top or side seam can damage the seal and allow bacteria to enter the can. Discard any can with a deep dent on any seam.

Is it Safe to Use Cans That Freeze Accidentally? Cans of food that freeze accidentally, such as those left in a car or basement in sub-zero temperatures, can present health problems. Food that has thawed and swelled because the food inside expanded when frozen. However, cans can be swollen because of contamination with botulism or spoilage-causing organisms. Do not use any swollen cans; discard them. Also, discard frozen cans that are not swollen but have been allowed to thaw at 40°F or higher. Cans that have thawed and refrozen are not safe.

A frozen can that has not thawed can be safely defrosted in the refrigerator and used. If the canned food is still frozen, let the intact can thaw in the refrigerator before opening.

Though avocados are high in fat, most of the fat is heart-healthy monounsaturated fat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, avocados are loaded with nutrients such as dietary fiber, vitamin B6, vitamin C, vitamin E, potassium, magnesium and folate. They’re also cholesterol and sodium free.

4-INGREDIENT GUACAMOLE

1 ripe avocado
1/2 teaspoon powdered cumin
Dash of cayenne pepper, optional (about 1/16 teaspoon)
1/2 to 1 ripe Roma tomato, diced; or use about 1/4 cup of grated or cherry tomatoes cut into smaller pieces
Salt (if desired)

Mash avocado with potato masher, pastry blender or fork. Mix in cumin and cayenne pepper. Stir in tomatoes. Add more cumin and cayenne as needed. Add salt to taste, if desired.

NOTES: Guacamole prepared without lime or lemon juice may turn brown sooner, so it is best to eat this version right after preparation.


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