

Monitoring Your Food Inventory

MONITORING THE PANTRY AND PREVENTING DISEASE

Life is easier and tasks can be accomplished conveniently and worry-free when an organized approach is used to manage food.

Your food supply, or as it is expressed in the 21st century, food safety, requires some thought and planning. So, we offer some ideas and guidelines here to help you take on Food Management with confidence!



First Steps to Organizing Your Food Supply

Managing your nutritional health requires careful planning for the short term (tonight's supper) and the longer term (the weekend). So to begin . . .

1. Map out what you usually like to eat for each meal--that's 3 meals/day. For instance, cereal, some kind of milk on it, fruit or fruit juice for breakfast. Soup, sandwich, and salad for lunch. Entree, 2 veggies, a starch for supper.

Monitoring Your Food Inventory

2. From that map, begin your Shopping List on a permanent surface: wall chart, note pad, phone app, or computer. Create some basic categories: Beverages, Meals (Brkfst, Lunch, Supper, Snacks), Desserts. In another space position lists for: Baking supplies, Frying supplies, Seasonings
3. Within the above categories list the items needed for that grouping -- what do you have in your food inventory now?
4. From that listing, as you create your shopping list, determine when your shopping day should be, how often, and what you will need from one shopping day to the next.

You will alter this over time as you adopt new, perhaps more healthy, recipes or food combinations or choices for your meals. But, it is helpful to have a concrete or tangible structure from which to plan.

Your next strategy is to assure that food items are safe and within the expiration date on the labeling. So you should develop some reminder system to check that on a monthly basis for non-perishable items and weekly for perishables. Post a reminder sign in your kitchen.

NOTE: Visual examination and a smell test for food stored in the refrigerator should be done weekly, if not more often. Grey, fuzzy toppings on dairy products and left-overs is not acceptable for your diet! Of particular importance are protein foods, which deteriorate quickly (dairy foods, eggs, fish, meats). You can't afford a bout of food poisoning!

Well, that should get you started . . .

More on Food Safety & Preventing Illness

Ordinary Lettuce, particularly the kind with loose leaves, could harbor bacteria that makes you sick, such as Listeria, salmonella or E. coli. And bagged greens or salad fixings are of concern. Here are [protective guidelines](#) from the CDC and the USDA you should heed.

[What about those Food Labels and the Expiration Date?](#)

Here are 29 ways to make that fresh produce last longer (from [Clark Howard's website](#))

1. Keep your fridge clean! I know it's not fun, but it is a necessary evil if you want food to last longer. Leftover residue or mold spores can increase the spoilage of all your food that is in the fridge.
2. Don't store fruits and vegetables near a gas stove. Natural gas has been shown to increase ripening just like Ethylene gas.
3. Don't store fruits and vegetables in an area that tends to have smoke and/or heat (this includes the stove/toaster oven and cigarette smoke). The exhaust and heat from these and certain combustion engines can increase the amount of Ethylene gas that gets produced and speeds up the ripening process.
4. Get an Ethylene gas absorber for your fridge, or there are also special bags that you can buy for storing produce.

Monitoring Your Food Inventory

5. Try not to cut your fruits and vegetables unless you have to, or will be using them right away. Even with proper storage, a cut apple is going to spoil faster than one that is not.
6. Place fresh herbs and leafy greens in a jar or vase of water, just like you would a bouquet of flowers. They'll last longer and you'll have a beautifully green arrangement!
7. If you'd like to take this last step a little further, you can place leafy greens and herbs in water, cover the top with plastic, and then place in the fridge.
8. Here's a fun trick for onions: If you want them to last up to 8 months, all you need do is grab that old pair of panty-hose you've been allowing to hide in the back of your top dresser drawer, place the onions in the panty-hose, and then tie a knot in between each one to keep them separate. Then hang this from the ceiling.
9. Dried green onions/chives can be chopped up and stored in a plastic water bottle and kept in the freezer. When you're ready to use some, just pull this out and sprinkle for a little somethin' somethin' to add to your dish.
10. Store potatoes with apples to keep them from sprouting, and don't let them anywhere near your panty-hose onions. Onions will make them go bad faster, but apples are a potatoes best friend!
11. When it comes to chopped up salad greens, your worst enemy is moisture. If you can keep the moisture at a minimum, then you'll keep your greens longer. Keep them in a bowl with a paper towel, and cover with plastic wrap. The paper towel will absorb the excess moisture.
12. Don't add tomatoes to your stored salad greens. The tomatoes contain the moisture that will wilt and rot your greens quickly.
13. Trapped moisture will also make mushrooms go bad. Store them in a brown paper bag in the fridge or a cool, dry place. Don't use plastic or glass, as this will trap in moisture.
14. Don't overstock the fridge. This leads to poor air circulation, and we want to keep our fruits and veggies at optimal temperature!
15. Clean your berries, fruits, and greens in a mixture of 10 parts water and 1 part white vinegar. Not only will this remove excess dirt and even pesticides, but it will also help them last longer by preventing mold.
16. To keep cut apples, avocados, or guacamole from turning brown, spritz with a little lemon juice and then cover with plastic.
17. Remove rotten apples immediately, because one rotten apple WILL spoil the entire bunch.
18. Keep bananas away from your other produce, as they produce some of the highest amounts of Ethylene gas.
19. Place plastic wrap around the crown of your banana bunch to keep them lasting longer. Side note: If you want them to ripen super fast, place them in a closed plastic bag. Since they emit so much Ethylene gas, they'll ripen quickly when the gas is trapped by the bag.
20. Tomatoes should stay at room temperature and away from sunlight. If you have your own tomato plant, you should pick tomatoes as soon as you notice that they are ripe. The

Monitoring Your Food Inventory

sun does an excellent job at ripening and spoiling them (especially once they are off the stem). Be sure not to store your tomatoes in plastic, as this will trap moisture and increase the likelihood of spoilage.

21. If you'd like to make your herbs last even longer, consider drying them. Bunch herbs loosely together with some string, and then hang in your kitchen.
22. Here's another fun way to store herbs: Cut them up, place in an ice tray, add olive oil, and then freeze. Then you have oil and herbs for your dishes at a moment's notice!
23. If you're not up for having an entire fridge of greens in vases of water, you can store things like celery, lettuce, kale, and broccoli in tin foil to decrease their spoilage time.
24. Don't keep meat and produce in the same area of the fridge. This makes cross-contamination likely.
25. If you're into [using roots like ginger or turmeric](#) in either your cooking or juicing, you can store these in the freezer and they'll still grate quite easily (peel and all!).
26. Use glassware for fridge storage of fruits and veggies. Many plastics may contain harmful chemicals that can increase spoilage. This is just another reason to have more fun Mason jars! You can even use a Food Saver vacuum sealer on Mason jars.
27. It probably goes without saying but freezing and canning for long-term storage of fruits and vegetables is the way to go. And you don't need an expensive canner to get started with canning.
28. Store your nuts in either the freezer or a Food Saver jar/bag. The key with nuts is avoiding moisture and air.
29. Don't keep your produce in the door of the fridge where temperatures are going to fluctuate. Keep them in the middle or your bottom drawers to keep temps more consistent.