



Food Storage for Safety and Quality

Whether it is food for next week's dinners or for emergency situations, how you handle and store foods can affect the quality, and in some cases, the safety of the food. Proper food storage begins at the garden gate if you grow the food and at the grocery store if you buy it. Any way you look at it, food is an investment. Proper handling and storage practices can help protect your investment by preserving the quality and insuring the safety of your food.

General Tips for Food Handling and Storage

1. Always choose foods that are at their peak quality.
 - Select produce that is just ripe and unblemished.
 - Avoid products with signs of spoilage such as mold growth or insect damage.
 - Check dates on product packages you purchase from the store.
 - Check to see that packages are clean, dry and show no signs of product tampering.
 - Check to see that cans are intact, with no bulging, dents, excessive rust or signs of leaking.
2. Handle foods properly in preparation for storage.
 - Pick up cold foods last at the store and get them home quickly.
 - Immediately refrigerate or freeze cold foods.
 - Never leave potentially hazardous foods like meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cut fruits and vegetables, cooked foods and dairy foods at room temperature for more than two hours.
 - Always handle foods with clean hands and clean utensils in clean work areas.
 - Package foods securely for storage.
3. Make sure storage areas are clean and correct storage temperatures are maintained.
 - Cupboards or pantries should be clean, cool and dry.
 - Refrigerators should be set at 35 to 38 °F so that foods stay at or below 40 °F.
 - Freezers should be set to keep foods at 0 °F or below.
4. Observe recommended storage times.
 - Label and date packages of food.
 - Use a system of "first in, first out" when it comes to rotating stored food.

Foods That Need Special Care

Some foods provide good conditions for bacteria to grow if the food is contaminated. Bacteria multiply rapidly in foods that are moist, rich in nutrients and low in acid if these foods are allowed to stay at temperatures between 40 and 140 °F for more than two hours. These foods include meats, poultry, fish and seafood, eggs, cut vegetables and fruits, cooked vegetables, most sauces, and milk. To ensure the safety and quality of these potentially hazardous foods, keep them refrigerated at 40 °F or below or freeze them.

Special Advice for the Pantry

Foods that can be stored safely at room temperature are dry ingredients and food products; foods with low moisture like peanut butter; foods high in sugar like unopened jams and jellies; and, foods that have been commercially canned or properly home-canned. The pantry or cupboard should be clean, free of pests, dry, cool and dark. The temperature should be kept around 50 to 70 °F to maintain the best possible quality for the longest amount of time. Avoid storing foods near ovens, furnaces, water heaters or hot pipes where warm temperatures can hasten a loss of nutrients and cause undesirable changes in the product. Store foods in plastic, glass or metal containers that be tightly sealed. Label foods with the name of the food and the date put in storage. Use foods with the oldest date first.

Special Advice for the Refrigerator

Keep refrigerators clean. Do not allow spills or spoiled foods to remain in your refrigerator. They not only can be a source of contamination, but also can cause undesirable odors that can be absorbed by other foods. Store raw foods like meats separate from foods that are cooked and foods that can be safely eaten without cooking. Do not allow raw juices to drip onto other foods or harmful bacteria may be transferred to the food. Cover foods well with air-tight wraps or put them in air-tight containers before placing them in the refrigerator. This maintains the quality of the foods by keeping them from drying out or absorbing odors from other foods. Use a refrigerator thermometer to be sure your refrigerator keeps food at 40 °F or below.

The length of time a food can be safely stored in the refrigerator depends on many things:

- The freshness or condition of the food when it was put into the refrigerator (Is it still within the time period for use as indicated by the date on the package? Is the product free of mold or insect damage? Is the food fresh or cooked?)
- How the food has been handled (Were hands washed? Were clean utensils and work areas used?)
- How the food was packaged for storage (Was it sealed well in air-tight containers or in coverings meant for food storage?)
- The temperature of the refrigerator (Does the temperature keep food 40 °F or below? Is a thermometer being used to measure the temperature?)
- Was the food placed into the refrigerator in a way that air could circulate around the product?
- Were large quantities cooled quickly by dividing them into shallow containers or by cooling in an ice bath before refrigerating?

The more times food is handled, the greater the chance for contamination to occur. If refrigerator temperatures do not keep food at 40 °F or below, then bacteria could multiply rapidly and cause spoilage or even foodborne illness. Recommended storage times are also based on a refrigerator temperature that keeps food 40 °F or below.

Special Advice for the Freezer

Freezing stops the growth of microorganisms. As long as a food is kept frozen at 0 °F or below, then microorganisms like bacteria, yeasts and molds will not be increasing in number or “growing.” Freezing does not eliminate the need for cooking to destroy bacteria. When exposed to freezing temperatures, some cells may die, but others will survive. If the food is allowed to warm up and thaw, these survivors will begin to multiply again and cause problems. Recommended freezer storage times are for best quality and not for safety. For every degree above 0 °F that the freezer operates, the length of time the product can be stored will decrease.

It is important to thaw frozen foods by one of three approved methods:

- By moving it to the refrigerator ahead of time.
- By placing it in cold water and changing the water often – at least every 30 minutes to keep the food cold.
- By using a microwave oven and then follow with immediate cooking either in the microwave or by some other method.

When preparing foods for freezing, use clean hands, utensils and work areas. Blanching either with boiling water or steam will help maintain the quality of vegetables to be frozen. Obtain blanching directions for specific foods from other Extension publications or contact your local Cooperative Extension office. Treating light-colored fruits with anti-darkening treatments will help to preserve the color of the fruit. Anti-darkening treatments include ascorbic acid (Vitamin C), commercially prepared ascorbic acid mixes available in the food preservation products section of grocery stores and fruit juices such as pineapple or lemon juice. Package foods to be frozen in moisture, vapor-resistant materials meant for freezing. These include plastic freezer containers, freezer bags, freezer wrap and heavy duty aluminum foil. Poor packaging can result in dry, crusty patches on foods called “freezer burn.” Although freezer burn is not harmful, it causes the texture and flavor of the product to be undesirable. When placing foods in the freezer, spread them out in a single layer until frozen. The faster a product freezes, the smaller the ice crystals that will be formed. This results in less damage to the texture of the product. Label and date each food product, and use a first-in, first-out system. Foods that have accidentally been thawed can be safely refrozen if either they still contain ice crystals or the temperature of the food has remained at 40 °F or below and for no more than 2 to 3 days.

The charts below list recommended storage times for best quality in the pantry and freezer and for best quality and safety in the refrigerator. If at any time during the storage of food, you see visible signs of spoilage such as mold growth, bubbling, bulging cans or lids, unpleasant odors, throw it out! For additional information on preparing foods for storage, contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

Recommended Food Storage Times

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
NR= Not Recommended				
<i>Bread, Pastries and Cakes</i>				
Breads, Baked (no preservatives)	2-3 weeks	2-3 months		Store in refrigerator to inhibit mold growth.
Bread, rolls (commercial)	7-14 days	3 months	2-4 days	
Unbaked	3-4 days	1 month		Longer storage inactivates yeast, weakens gluten
Cinnamon Rolls, Partially baked	1-2 weeks	2-3 months	Package date	
Cake, Angel Food	1 week	2 months	1-2 days	
Chiffon sponge	1 week	2 months	1-2 days	
Chocolate	1 week	4 months	1-2 days	
Frosted or Unfrosted		8-12 months 2-4 months		
Fruit cake	6 months	12 months	1 month	
Home frozen		3 months		
Made from Mix	1 week	4 months	3-4 days	
Purchased			1-2 days	
Pound		6 months		
Cheesecake	1 week	2-3 months		
Cookies, Baked	2 months	8-12 months	2-3 weeks	
Cookie dough	Use by date	2 months		
Doughnut	1 week	1 month	1-2 days	
Fruit pies, Unbaked	1 week	8 months	1-2 days	
Baked	1 week	6-8 months	1-2 days	
Mixes, biscuit, muffin, brownie			12-18 months	
Muffins, baked	1 week	2 months	1-2 days	
Pies, Pumpkin or chiffon	1-2 days			
Pie Crust, Ready-To-Bake	Use by date	2 months		
Quick Breads, Baked		2-3 months		
Refrigerated biscuit, rolls, pastry and cookie dough	Use by date	NR		Expiration date on package
Waffles, pancakes, bought frozen	3-4 days	2 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Cereals/Grains/Rice				
Cereal, ready-to eat (opened)			3 months	
ready-to-eat (unopened)			6-12 months	
Cereal, ready-to-cook (oatmeal, etc.)			12 months	
opened			6-12 months	
Cornmeal, opened	12 months		6-12 months	Refrigerate after opening
Egg Noodles, dry, unopened			2 years	
opened			1-2 months	
Flour, white	6-8 months	12 months	6-12 months	Keep in airtight container
whole wheat	6-8 months	12 months	1 month	
Grits			12 months	Store in air tight container.
Pancake, biscuit mixes			15 months	Use by package date.
Pasta, dry			1-2 years	
Rice, white, unopened			2 years	
opened	6 months			
Rice, brown, unopened			1 year	
opened	6 months			
Rice, mixes			6 months	Use all
Tortillas	4-7 days	4 months	2-4 days	
Yeast, dry			Expiration date on package	
Dairy Products				
Butter	1-3 months	6-9 months		Freeze in original container, overwrap with plastic or plastic freezer bag
Buttermilk	1-2 weeks	3 months		Check date on carton. Will keep several days after date.
Cheeses: Hard and wax-coated (cheddar, swiss, gouda, brick, etc.), unopened	6 months	6 months		
Cheeses: Soft (Brie, Bel Paese), opened or sliced	1 week	6 months		
Cream cheese	2 weeks	NR		Becomes crumbly in freezer. Can be used in cooking.
Cottage cheese	1 week	NR		Freezing changes texture.
Parmesan and Romano cheeses, unopened			10 months	

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Dairy Products Cont'd.				
Parmesan and Romano cheeses, opened or grated	1 month	3-4 months		
Processed cheeses, slices	1-2 months	NR		
Ricotta cheese	1 week	NR		
Cream (half-and-half and light)	3-4 days	4 months		
Cream (half-and-half and light), UHT, unopened	4 weeks			
Cream (half-and-half and light), UHT, opened	1 week			
Cream (heavy and whipping)	1 week	NR		Whipping cream will not whip after thawing. Whipped cream may be frozen and stored for 12 weeks.
Dips, commercial	2 weeks	NR		
homemade, sour cream based	3-4 days	NR		
Eggnog, commercial	3-5 days	6 months		
Margarine	6 months	12 months		Overwrap with plastic for frozen storage.
Milk, fresh, pasteurized	1 week	3 months		
reconstituted nonfat dry	1 week	1-3 months		
nonfat dry, unopened			6 months	
nonfat dry, opened			3 months	
evaporated, condensed, sweetened condensed, unopened			12 months	
evaporated, condensed, sweetened condensed, opened	4-5 days			
Sour cream	2-3 weeks	NR		Will separate if frozen.
Whipped topping, in aerosol can	3-4 weeks	NR		
frozen carton (thawed)	2 weeks	NR		
from prepared mix	3 days	NR		
Yogurt	7-14 days	1-2 months		Will separate if frozen.
frozen		2 months		
Ice cream		2-4 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
<i>Eggs and Egg Products</i>				
Eggs, in shell, fresh	3-5 weeks	NR		Decorated Easter eggs: Do not eat if at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
whites	2-4 days	12 months		
yolks	2-4 days	12 months		
hard-cooked	1 week	NR		
deviled	2-3 days			
Liquid pasteurized eggs, egg substitutes, opened	3 days	NR		
unopened	10 days	1 year		
Egg-containing dishes (Quiche)	3-4 days	2 months	2 hours	
Puddings, Canned, opened	2 days Package date	NR		
<i>Fish and Seafood</i>				
Canned fish or seafood, unopened			12 months	
opened	1 day	NR		
Clams, shucked	1-2 days	3-4 months		Store in coldest part of refrigerator. Do not use if liquid is frothy.
in shell	2 days			
Crab, in shell	1-2 days	2 months		
meat (cooked)	3-5 days	4 months		
Crawfish, in shell		6 months		
meat (cooked)	3-5 days	6 months		
Fish: Fatty (mackerel, trout, salmon, etc.)	1-2 days	2-3 months		
Fish: Lean (cod, flounder, haddock, halibut, etc.)	1-2 days	4-8 months		
Fish, breaded, frozen		3 months		
Fish or shellfish, cooked	3-4 days	1-2 months		
Lobster, in shell (live) or raw meat	1-2 days	2-3 months		
tail meat (cooked)	1-2 days	6 months		
Oysters, clams, mussels, live	1-2 days	2-3 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Fish and Seafood Cont'd.				
Scallops	1-2 days	3 months		
Shrimp, uncooked	1-2 days	3-6 months		
Smoked Fish	3-4 days	2 months		
Meats, Fresh				
Bratwurst, fresh uncooked	1-2 days	2-3 months		
Chops, pork, lamb, veal	3-5 days	4-6 months		
Ground beef, turkey or pork	1-2 days	3-4 months		
Roasts, beef, veal, pork, lamb	3-5 days	4-12 months		
Sausage, raw	1-2 days	1-2 months		
Steaks, beef, veal, lamb, pork	3-5 days	6-12 months		
Stew meat	1-2 days	3-4 months		
Variety meats	1-2 days	3-4 months		
Meats, Cooked				
Bratwurst, precooked	5-7 days	2-3 months		
Canned meat, opened	2-3 days	NR		
Meat and meat dishes, cooked	3-4 days	2-3 months		Quickly refrigerate leftovers.
Gravy, meat broths	1-2 days	2-3 months		
Casseroles, meat pies, tv dinners, stews				
Casseroles	3-4 days	2-3 months		
Meats, processed, cured, and smoked				
Bacon	7 days	1 month		Keep packaged meats in original package. For quality, use within one week of "sell by" date.
Frankfurters, unopened	2 weeks	1-2 months		Frozen, cured meats lose quality rapidly; use as soon as possible.
opened	1 week	1-2 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Meats, processed, cured, and smoked Cont'd.				
Ham, whole	7 days	1-2 months		Small pieces of canned ham (opened) may be frozen for 4-6 weeks.
half	3-5 days	1-2 months		
slices	3-4 days	1-2 months		
canned, unopened	6-9 months	NR		
canned, opened	3-5 days	1-2 months		
country-style	7 days	1 month	1 year (whole)	
Hotdogs, unopened	2 weeks	1-2 months		
opened	1 week	1-2 months		
Luncheon meats, unopened	2 weeks	1-2 months		
opened	3-5 days	1-2 months		
Sausage, smoked	1 week	1-2 months		
dry and semi-dry	2-3 weeks	1-2 months		
summer, unopened	3 months	1-2 months		
opened	3 weeks	1-2 months		
Poultry, Fresh				
Chicken or turkey, whole	1-2 days	12 months		
pieces	1-2 days	9 months		
Duck and goose, whole	1-2 days	6 months		
Giblets	1-2 days	3-4 months		
Poultry, Cooked				
Cooked pieces	3-4 days	1 month		
with gravy or broth	1-2 days	6 months		
Casseroles or poultry dishes	3-4 days	4-6 months		
Canned, opened	1 day	NR		
Fried chicken	3-4 days	4 months		
Nuggets, chicken	1-2 days	1-3 months		
Rotisserie Chicken	3-4 days	6 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Wild Game				
Rabbit, squirrel	1-2 days	6-12 months		
Venison	2-4 days	6-12 months		
Wild duck, pheasant, goose (whole)	1-2 days	6 months		
Fruits				
Apples	3 weeks	(cooked) 8 months	1-2 days	
Apricots	2-3 days	8 months	until ripe	
Avocados	3-4 days	NR	until ripe	
Bananas	2 days (skins will blacken)	1 months (whole, peeled)	until ripe	Peel, dip in lemon juice, tray freeze; store in freezer bag.
Berries, Cherries	1-2 days	8 months		
Canned fruit, unopened opened	1 week		12 months	Texture will be softer after freezing. Refrigerate in glass or plastic.
Citrus fruits	1-2 weeks	4-6 months	10 days	Wrap cut surfaces to prevent Vitamin C loss.
Coconut	2-3 weeks	6 months (shredded)	1 week	
Fruit, dried	6 months		6 months (unopened) 1 month (opened)	
Grapes	1 week	1 month whole	1 day	
Juice, fresh	6 days	12 months		
canned and bottled (opened)	7-10 days	12-18 months	9 months	Transfer canned juice to glass or plastic container after opening.
frozen (concentrated)		12 months		
frozen (reconstituted)	6 days			
Melons	3-4 days	1 month (balls)	1-2 days	Wrap cut surfaces to prevent Vitamin C loss, control odors.
Peaches, Nectarines	3-4 days	8-12 months	until ripe	
Pears, Plums	3-4 days	8-12 months	3-5 days	
Pineapple	2 days	8-12 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Fruits Cont'd.				
Raisins	6 months		6 months (unopened) 1 month (opened)	
Vegetables				
Artichokes	1-2 weeks	NR	1-2 days	
Asparagus	3-4 days	8 months		
Beans, green or waxed	3-4 days	8 months		
lima (unshelled)	3-5 days	8 months		
Beets	1-10 days	6-8 months	1 day	
Broccoli	3-5 days	10-12 months		
Brussel sprouts	3-5 days	10-12 months		
Cabbage	1-2 weeks	10-12 months		
Carrots	3 weeks	10-12 months		
Celery	1-2 weeks	10-12 months		
Cauliflower	3-5 days	10-12 months		
Corn, kernels		8-12 months		
on-the-cob	1-2 days	8 months		
in husks	1-2 days	NR		
Cucumbers	4-5 days	NR		
Eggplant	3-4 days	6-8 months	1 day	
Garlic	1-2 weeks	1 month	1 month	
Greens, spinach	1-2 days	10-12 months		
Lettuce	1 week	NR		Store in bag or lettuce keeper.
Mushrooms	2-3 days	10-12 months		Do not wash before refrigerator storage.
Okra	2-3 days	10-12 months		
Onions, green	1-2 weeks	10-12 months		
dry	2 months	10-12 months	2-3 weeks	
Parsley	1 week	1-2 months		

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Vegetables Cont'd.				
Peas	3-5 days	8-12 months		Store in refrigerator until used.
Peppers, chile, bell	4-5 days	6-8 months		
Potatoes, white, fresh	1-2 weeks	10-12 months (cooked & mashed)	1-2 months	
Potatoes, sweet, fresh			2-3 weeks	
Potatoes, instant, unopened			6-12 months	
Radishes	1-2 weeks	NR		
Rhubarb	2 weeks			
Rutabagas	2 weeks	8-10 months	1 week	
Squash, summer	4-5 days	10-12 months		
winter	2 weeks	10-12 months	1 week	
Tomatoes, ripe	2-3 days	2 months	until ripe	
Turnips	2 weeks	8-10 months		
Vegetables, bought frozen	3-4 days	8 months		
Miscellaneous				
Baby food, unopened			1 year	Store covered. Do not feed baby from jar. Reheat only enough for 1 feeding.
Baby food, opened	2-3 days			
Soups, stews	2-3 days	4-6 months		
Sandwiches	2-3 days	1 month		
Pizza	3-4 days	1-2 months		
Stuffing, cooked	3-4 days	1 month		
Dry Foods/Staples				
Baking powder, unopened			6 months	
opened			3 months	
Baking soda, unopened			18 months	
opened			6 months	
Bouillon cubes or granules			2 years	
Bread crumbs			6 months	

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Dry Foods/Staples Cont'd.				
Cake, cookie, and brownie mixes			12-18 months	
Canned foods			1 year	Refrigerate after opening.
Casserole mixes			9-12 months	
Chocolate			18-24 months	May discolor.
Chocolate Syrup, unopened			2 years	Refrigerate after opening.
opened			6 months	
Cocoa mixes			indefinitely	
Coconut, shredded, canned, packaged, unopened			12 months	
Coffee, cans, unopened			2 years	
cans, opened			1 week	
Coffee, instant, unopened			1 years	
instant, opened			2-3 months	
Coffee creamer, powdered, unopened			9 months	Keep lid tightly closed.
powdered, opened			6 months	
Cornstarch			18 months	
Crackers, unopened			8 months	
opened			1 month	
Cream liqueurs, unopened			6-8 months	
Dried foods			6-12 months	
Extracts, unopened			3 years	
opened			12 months	
Frosting, canned, unopened	1 week		10 months	
opened				
Mix, unopened			12 months	
Gelatin, flavored			18 months	
Hard liquors			indefinitely	
Herbs			1-2 years	
Herb and spice blends	6 months	6-12 months	6 months	
Honey			12 months	
Hot roll mix			18 months	
Hot sauce, Worcestershire sauce, etc.			2 years	
Jellies, jams, unopened	6 months		12 months	Refrigerate after opening.

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Dry Foods/Staples Cont'd.				
Ketchup, chili sauce, unopened			12 months	
opened		6 months	1 month	
Liquid breakfast or diet mixes			6 months	
Molasses, unopened			12 months	
opened			6 months	
Marshmallows			2-4 months	
Marshmallow cream, unopened			2-4 months	
Mayonnaise, unopened			2-3 months	Refrigerate after opening.
opened	2 months	NR		
Mustard, prepared yellow, unopened	12 months			
opened	12 months		1 month	
Nuts, in shell, unopened			4 months	
vacuum can, unopened			3 months	
package or can, unopened		3 months	6 months	
unsalted		9-12 months		
Oils, Vegetable & Olive, unopened			6 months	
opened		4 months	1-3 months	
Nut Oil, unopened			6 months	
Sprays, unopened			2 years	
opened			1 year	
Peanut butter, unopened			6-9 months	
opened			2-3 months	
Peas, beans, dried			12 months	
Pectin			1 year or expiration date	
Pie crust mix			8 months	
Pickles and olives, unopened			12 months	
opened	1-2 weeks			
Popcorn, kernels in jar			2 years	
microwave packets, unopened			12 months	
Potatoes, instant mix			6-12 months	
Potato Chips, unopened			2 months	
opened			1-2 weeks	
Prepared, packaged, shelf-stable foods, unopened			1 year	

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Dry Foods/Staples Cont'd.				
Salad dressing, unopened		3 months	10-12 months	
made from mix			2 weeks	
Salsa, unopened			12 months	
opened	1 month			
Sauce and gravy mixes			2 years	
Shortening, solid			8 months	
Soda: carbonated cola drinks			3 mos after date	
regular soda, bottle				
regular soda, cans			9 mos after date	
diet soda, bottles or cans			3 mos after date	
Soup mixes			12 months	
Spices, whole			2-4 years	
ground			2-3 years	
Sugar, brown			4 months	
confectioners			18 months	
granulated			2 years	
sugar substitute			2 years	
Syrups			12 months	
Tea, bags, unopened			18 months	
instant, unopened			3 years	
loose, unopened			2 years	
Toaster pastries			6-9 months	Keep foil packets sealed.
Vanilla extract, unopened			2 years	
opened			12 months	
Water, Bottled			1-2 years	
Whipped topping, dry			12 months	

Food	Refrigerator (37-40°F)	Freezer (0°F)	Cupboard (50-70°F)	Special Comments
Soy Products				
Miso	3 months	NR		
Soy Flour, defatted, low-fat			1 year	
Full fat		6 months	2 months	
Soy or Rice Beverage	7-10 days	NR		
Tofu	1 week	5 months		Change storage water every day or 2 after opening.
Textured Soy Protein, unopened			2 years	

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Elizabeth L. Andress, Ph.D., Extension Food Safety Specialist and Judy A. Harrison, Ph.D., Extension Foods Specialist

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