

BEFORE YOU BUY IN BULK

The large 'economy' size isn't always the best fit for your groceries



BY LISA LEE FREEMAN

Supersizing your groceries was a smart move last year, when worries about shortages and COVID at the super-market ran high. Now, with food prices rising, buying in bulk can still make sense.

But to eat well, avoid waste and save money, you need to know how long food will keep at home. Here's a sampling of foods worth buying in bulk—and those to skip, unless you're feeding a crowd. Note that "use by" and "sell by" dates generally don't refer to safety. (Baby formula is an exception.) Instead, these dates indicate how long food will retain peak quality, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In many cases, you can stretch that out.

YES

Canned goods Low-acid foods such as meats and most veggies can be safe to eat "in-

definitely," the USDA says, if cans aren't rusty, swollen or dented



and they are stored in a cool, dry place. But quality will decline within two to five years. Acidic foods like canned tomatoes and fruit are good for up to 18 months.

White sugar It has no expiration date, according to the Sugar Association. Store in opaque, airtight, moisture-proof containers, since sugar can absorb odors even through plastic bags.

Rice Stored in an airtight container in a place that's cool and dry, white rice can last for 25 to 30 years. Brown rice, however, contains oils that will spoil after about six months unless stored in the refrigerator or freezer.

Herbs and spices Vanilla extract and salt can last virtually forever. Many other spices, especially whole or unground ones such as peppercorns and nutmeg, can last for up to four years. Dried, leafy herbs such as basil and oregano are good for one to three years.

MAYBE

Meat Many meats can last for months in the freezer. Although the flavors of bacon,



sausage, hot dogs and lunch meat decline after a month or two, raw hamburger and fried chicken can go for three to four months before they lose their mojo. Longer-lasting meats include steaks and roasts (six to 12 months), and chicken and turkey parts (nine months).

Nuts Unless you're like my dad, who snacks on walnuts by the pound, loading up on nuts can be risky. In the pantry, they can go rancid in a few months or less. But you can extend the life of nuts in an airtight container in the freezer, where they can last for two years.

IFFY

Coffee If you really care about coffee's flavor, buy it in small amounts and



store it in an opaque and seriously airtight container in a cool spot. If the main stash is in the freezer, dole out no more than a week's supply at a time.

Olive oil Those giant tins of extra-virgin olive oil may be tempting, but if you're a small household, odds are that the oil will start to go rancid before you use it up. Opened EVOO may last only a few months. You'll know it's gone bad if it starts to smell like crayons or glue.

Dairy products Flavors and textures of cheese and other dairy products like yogurt generally won't hold up in the freezer. Exceptions include cheese that you plan to use as a salad topper or as a recipe ingredient, such as Parmesan and shredded mozzarella (place portions, no larger than a half pound, in moisture-proof containers), or salted butter; all of these can last for nine months.

Condiments Ketchup, along with barbecue and cocktail sauces, will keep for a year or so unopened. But once open, they will last four to six months in the fridge. Mustard will last a year if refrigerated. So skip the jug! ■

Lisa Lee Freeman, a consumer and shopping expert, was founder and editor in chief of ShopSmart magazine from Consumer Reports.

