

February: National Canned Food Month

By: Lisa Franzen-Castle, RD, PhD, Nutrition Specialist
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension
Author E-mail: lfranzen2@unl.edu

Canned foods are convenient, portable, quick, and have a long shelf life. They also help provide needed nutrients to meet USDA Dietary Guidelines. During February, National Canned Food Month, experiment with different recipes and meal ideas using canned foods. There are several varieties of canned foods on grocery store shelves, offering an array of nutritious options. Check out the following tips on storing and using canned foods.



Tips for Storing & Using Canned Foods:

Purchasing canned goods: Avoid rusted, dented, scratched, or bulging cans. Always check freshness dates on foods. Below are different types of “dates” you may see on canned items.

- **Sell by:** tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires to have enough time to use it at best quality.
- **Best if used by:** is recommended for best flavor or quality. It’s not a purchase or safety date.
- **Use by:** is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality and has been determined by the manufacturer.
- **Closed or coded:** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer to rotate the stock as well as to locate products in the event of a recall.

Comparing food labels: Read the Nutrition Facts Label on products to find food with the most nutrition for your money. Using the Nutrition Facts Label helps you compare fat, calories, fiber, sodium and sugar found in different products. They also provide information on the serving size and how many servings are in an item. Look for lower sodium or no salt added versions of canned foods.



Storing canned foods in the cupboard/pantry:

Store canned food in clean, cool, dark, and dry spaces. Don’t put them above the stove, under the sink, in a damp garage or basement, or any place exposed to high or low temperature extremes. The optimal temperature range is 50-70°F. Temperatures over 100°F may cause canned food to deteriorate and lose quality. Freezing temperatures may cause changes in food textures, and lead to rust, bursting cans, and broken seals that may let in harmful bacteria.



First in, first out rule: To prevent foods from spoiling use the first in, first out rule as your rotation system. Using this rotation method will help you use older canned and dried food items



before using recently purchased products. Write the date of purchase on food items to help maintain a rotation. Check canned items regularly for signs of spoilage. Do not use food from cracked, bulging or leaking cans, or those that spurt liquid when opened; discard cans immediately.

Fortifying with fruits and vegetables: Canned fruits and vegetables are always in season and packed at the peak of freshness. Keep canned tomatoes, beans, fruits and vegetables on hand to quickly create



meals or boost the nutrition of recipes. Try adding canned black beans, chick peas, Mandarin oranges, beets or other colorful fruits and vegetables to your next salad. Canned soup, broth, pasta and chili can serve up meals with vegetables, grains and protein.

Check out these canned food resources: Food safety tips and time saving recipes and meals at: <http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/february#cannedfood>.



For more food, nutrition, and health information go to food.unl.edu or scan the QR code with your smart phone or other electronic device and go directly to the website.

Quick Recipe Ideas with Canned Foods!

HUMMUS

- For an easy, low-fat and flavorful dip, make your own hummus. Drain, rinse and purée a can of chickpeas in a food processor with 3 tablespoons each of olive oil and freshly-squeezed lemon juice. Add crushed garlic to taste. Serve with fresh vegetables or bite-sized slices of pita bread
- **Source:** <http://www.mealtime.org/recipe-search-tips-and-timesavers/timesaving-recipe-tips/>

WHITE CHILI

- **Ingredients:** 2 tablespoons olive oil, 1 onion, finely chopped, 1 (4 oz.) can green chilies, drained, 2 (15 oz.) cans great northern beans, 1 (14.5 oz.) can chicken broth, 2 teaspoons garlic powder, ½ teaspoon pepper, 2 teaspoon ground cumin, 1½ cups cooked chicken, cubed, and 4 ounces low-fat Monterey jack cheese, shredded.
- **Directions:** In a large sauce pan, heat oil. Add onion and cook until tender. Add green chilies, beans (do not drain), chicken broth, garlic powder, pepper, ground cumin, and chicken. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes or until desired consistency. Serve hot, topped with cheese. Makes 6 servings.
- **Source:** <http://food.unl.edu/web/nep/cooks-helper>

Additional Resources & Links:

- **How to Interpret Can Sizes.** Some favorite older recipes may call for can sizes such as a Number 2 or a Number 303 can. Here's a chart to help you determine how these correspond to current can measurements.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/can-sizes>.

- **Basic Foods to have on Hand.** This list of foods can be combined and recombined in a variety of new, delicious (and nutritious!) ways. They are offered as a starter list to help develop a list that works for you.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/basic-list>.
- **Recipe Central.** Enjoy healthy cooking from your own kitchen. Use recipes from our collections to get started!
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/recipe-central>
- **UNL Extension Calendar** – National Food Days, Weeks, and Months for February.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/february>

Sources:

1. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND). (2012). Tip of the Day: National Canned Food Month. Accessed at: <http://www.eatright.org/Public/content.aspx?id=6442474304>.
2. Jahner, B. and Nummer, B. (2008). Canned Goods. Utah State University Extension. Accessed at: <http://extension.usu.edu/foodstorage/hm/canned-goods>.
3. Canned Food Alliance. Canned Food Fills MyPlate. Mealtime.org. Accessed on 01/24/14. Accessed at: <http://go.unl.edu/mrve>.
4. Albrecht, J. (2007). Food Storage. EC446. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension. Accessed at: <http://ianrpubs.unl.edu/live/ec446/build/ec446.pdf>.
5. Schmutz, P. and Hoyle, E. (1999). Safe Handling of Canned Goods. HGIC 3505. Clemson Cooperative Extension. Accessed at: http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/food_safety/handling/hgic3505.html.

Updated: January 2014