

Ask the Experts

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Question: It occurred to me that we can have food clutter like any other clutter. How do we manage food in the pantry, fridge and freezer and stay on top of expiration dates?

Answer: Great question! Food is expensive so we certainly don't want to waste any.

When I work with clients to organize their kitchens, too often we end up tossing a lot of expired food, sometimes hundreds of dollars worth. Just like clothes hanging in your closet or folded in drawers, it takes an awareness of what's being used and, maybe more importantly, not used. It's said that we wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time. I imagine the numbers are the same with our food. We tend to use often the things we like. Here are 17 tips to get your pantry in order.

1. Empty all food from your pantry and cabinets.
2. Toss everything that has expired.
3. Sort into categories: canned goods, snacks, spices, baking—whatever makes sense to you.
4. Within categories, group similar items, such as soup.
5. Place items near where used, if possible. For example, put spices in your cooking zone.
6. Put often used items on easy-to-reach shelves and less frequently used items on high or low shelves.
7. Put mom- or dad-approved snacks at a child-friendly height.
8. Put taller items behind shorter ones so they are all visible.
9. Put new items behind existing ones and

use the ones in front first.

10. Use small containers to corral packets.
11. Use containers to hold categories of food. For example, baking pans can hold baking supplies. When ready to bake, just grab the pan.
12. Use tiered organizers so everything is visible.
13. Use lazy susans/turntables and give them a spin to see everything.
14. Once every couple of months or once a quarter do a food inventory. (Note in your calendar to remember.) Look in your pantry, cabinets, fridge and freezer and check expiration dates. Use up anything nearing expiration. Add what you need to your shopping list.
15. Put newly purchased fresh and frozen food toward the rear and move the older food forward.
16. Frozen food usually doesn't have expiration dates. If it helps, label with the date purchased before storing in the freezer. That way you'll know how long it's been there.
17. When you start running low on something, immediately add it to your shopping list so you don't forget.

Bonus idea: Look in your pantry, fridge and freezer to see what you haven't used in a while. Do a Google search listing those foods and see what comes up! I bet you'll discover some interesting recipes!

Do you have a question for our organizing experts? We would love to hear from you. Email us at info@gettingorganizedmagazine.com GO



