UC MASTER FOOD PRESERVER PROGRAM SAN DIEGO COUNTY

UC Master Food Preserver
University of California
Agriculture & Natural Resources

SEE YOU IN 2026!

The University of California Master Food Preserver Program extends UC research-based information about home food safety and preservation to the public. We look forward to seeing you in 2026 at our many events.

If you or someone you know is interested in having a UC Master Food Preserver present to your group or club, let us know!

PHOTO: JODI BAY

UPCOMING EVENTS

1/15/2026, 10-11am: Basics of Food Spoilage and Preservations at the Oceanside Library
2/19/2026, 10-11am: Methods of Food Preservation at the Oceanside Library
3/16/2026, 12-2pm: Preserving your Harvest, Lakeside Garden Club
3/19/2026, 10-11am: Emergency Preparedness at the Oceanside Library
3/21/2026, 9-3pm: Workshops and information table at Sikes Adobe Historic Farmstead

Visit our webpage for upcoming events and more information: https://ucanr.edu/site/master-food-preserver-program-san-diego-county

DATE CODES, DECIPHERED

BEST BEFORE

BY: JODI BAY, UC MASTER FOOD PRESERVER

They are part of our everyday life. We look at them in the store to make purchase decisions and in our pantry to determine what to save or toss. Date codes on our food are expected but what do they mean?

Date codes on packaged food began after World War II as business transitioned towards larger, centrally located stores. The code was a scramble of undecipherable numbers and letters and the initial use was for the grocers to track and manage inventory to ensure that the products being offered for sale were of the best quality. In the following decades, consumers demanded code transparency and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) coordinated efforts to standardize date code information. Date codes are not regulated and are optional to the manufacturer. Therefore, there is not consistent information on product date codes.The consumable products date codes that are regulated are pharmaceuticals, baby food and baby formula. The expiration dates on these categories reflect decline in the nutrition or medicinal effectiveness of the product.

Date codes are segmented into different types depending on the type of food. Here is a summary:

Date of Pack or Manufacturer - This states the date the food was packed or processed to sell. It is used on shelf-stable products such as canned or boxed goods. It is often used for recalls.

Freshness, Pull or Sell-By Date – This date tells the retailer how long to keep the product on the shelf. Products are safe to consume for a few days after the 'Sell-by' date but quality may have declined.

'Sell-By' dates are common on breads, baked goods and dairy. Always use your best judgement. Use or Best By - 'Use or Best By' date is the recommended shelf life for best flavor or quality of the product. It is safe to consume past the 'Use or Best By' date but the product quality may have declined or off-flavors may develop. This code is common on frozen foods, fried snack products, cereals, canned foods, pasta and rice.
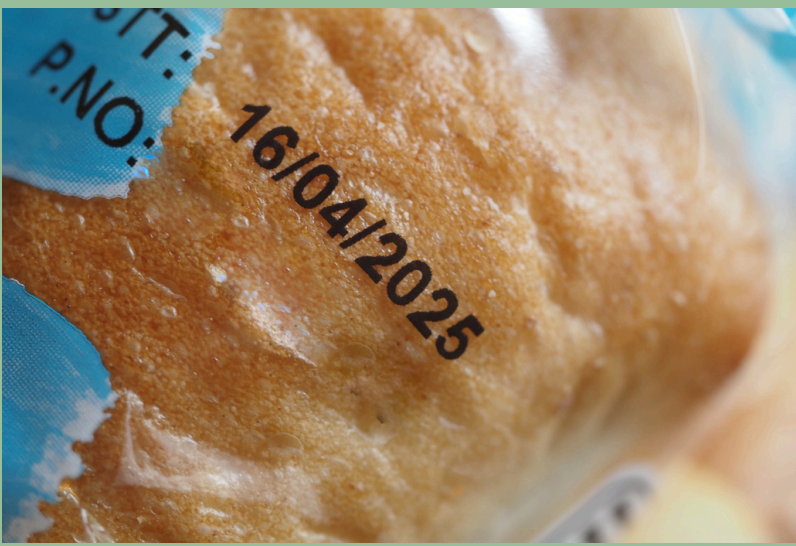
Use or Best By - Infant Formula and some Baby Food - Infant formula and some baby foods date coding is regulated by law. The products are dated for nutrient retention and product quality. Do NOT use baby formula and foods past the 'Use By' date.

Freeze By Date – Commonly found on meat products, these products should be used or frozen prior to the date on the package.

Expiration Date - The last date for best quality of packaged products is the Expiration Date. This is often found on yeast and baking powder.

To best manage your pantry and reduce food waste, purchase and plan according to date codes. Buy what will be used within the printed date code. Always trust your instincts. If the packaged good shows signs of inadvertent opening, discoloration or odor and seems unsafe, discard it. It is never worth consuming a suspicious food product if there is a chance it will make you or your family ill.

From our kitchen to yours, we wish you a very happy New Year!

PHOTO: JODI BAY

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT PRESERVING FOOD, ASK US! MFPSD@UCANR.EDU