



Store staples properly to keep long-term

I bought a lot of baking ingredients in anticipation of the holidays, but I ran out of time. What is the best way to store flour, sugar, butter and nuts for the long term?

Those foods last a long time when stored properly. For the best quality, follow recommended guidelines:

- Store flour in an airtight container, and it will easily keep for six to eight months at room temperature. Careful, though: If stored in an environment that's too warm, flour will likely attract insects.

Store whole-wheat flour in the refrigerator — it still contains wheat germ, and that has a bit of fat in it. Refrigerating it will prevent the fat from turning rancid.

- Sugar will keep two or more years at room temperature. It's often used as a preservative, so it's no wonder that it lasts a long time. Store it in an airtight container to prevent it from hardening and clumping.

Brown sugar also should be stored in an airtight container and is best used within four months. If it gets so hard that you can't break it apart, place it on a cookie sheet and heat it in a warm oven (250 to 300 degrees F) until it softens. Measure while it's still warm, because it will harden again as it cools.

- The recommended time to store butter in the refrigerator is a scant two weeks. It will keep up to six to

nine months in the freezer; after that, its flavor and texture could decline. Margarine is a bit hardier, keeping four to six months refrigerated or a year frozen. Any solid fat will absorb flavors and odors of other foods, so keep butter and margarine covered or wrapped tightly.

- Nuts will keep in the freezer for six to eight months if they're salted; unsalted nuts freeze well for nine to 12 months. Stored at room temperature, in-shell nuts will last about four months. Unopened packages of nutmeats will be fine for about three months, or up to a year if in an unopened vacuum-packed can. Opened packages keep only about two weeks at room temperature.

And if you ever do manage to get your baking done, leftover home-baked cookies will last three months in the freezer. Just wrap them tight in foil or plastic wrap or keep them in airtight freezer containers, and then thaw and enjoy. Warming them in the microwave oven for a few seconds or a 300-degree conventional oven for five minutes will make them seem like they were baked fresh.

For more food storage tips from Ohio State University Extension, go to <http://ohioline.osu.edu>, click on "Food," and then on "Food Safety and Storage."

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic

(614) 292-9833

filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Jaime Foster, registered dietitian and program specialist for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition, College of Education and Human Ecology.

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**Section of Communications
and Technology
News and Media Relations**
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
(614) 292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
(330) 263-3780

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