WASTE LESS, TASTE MORE 049

Understand the Date on the Package



A QUALITY DATE AND A STORAGE LIMIT ARE DIFFERENT THINGS.

When checking ingredients before a dinner party, read the wording around the printed date. In the United States, many date labels describe quality rather than a food safety deadline.

1 Read the whole phrase

“Best if Used By” generally indicates when the manufacturer expects the best flavor or quality. “Sell-By” helps a retailer manage stock.

Why: A date without its wording does not tell the whole story.

2 Check storage and opening instructions

Look for directions such as “keep refrigerated” and guidance for use after opening.

Why: The printed date does not replace proper storage or instructions for an opened product.

3 Use food-specific guidance

Consider what the food is, whether it has been opened or cooked, and how it has been handled.

Why: A package date alone cannot establish that a food is safe.

KITCHEN NOTES

Keep the exception clear

Infant formula has different date requirements and should not be used after its use-by date.

Label opening dates when useful

Knowing when you opened an ingredient can help you follow its instructions.

Avoid a smell-only decision

A normal appearance or smell does not establish safety.

THE PLATING MINDSET

Make informed decisions about ingredients before they become part of a guest’s plate.

Food date labels: USDA (linked in PDF)