

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Does the Mold Have to Go?

Maybe it's because of the tight economy, but there seem to be more people asking questions about whether they can keep food with a little bit of mold on it. Moldy bread, moldy fruit, moldy cheese, moldy vegetables, they are questioning all of it. So, what can we keep, what must we throw when it comes to mold?

First we need to remember that not all molds are bad. Without certain kinds of mold we would not have Brie or Camembert cheeses, no bleu or blue cheese either. Other fungi and yeasts which are closely related to molds give us the riches of beer and wine, breads and certain salamis and sausages. We wouldn't have penicillin, the first antibiotic ever recognized. So please, don't think we need to throw away all molds.

Secondly, even if we would happen to eat something moldy, most of us would not come down with diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps or any of the other common signs of food poisoning. Mold rarely makes us sick that way. Of course it can make food look or smell bad enough that we might feel like throwing up even without eating it. But it's been said that the slimy weird colors are just mold's way of protecting its food supply! Make it look bad enough and we won't eat it, leaving it all for the mold.

On the other hand, Grandmother was probably not strict enough when she said "Oh, just scoop it off." if spots of mold showed up on a jar of jelly. No one knew, years ago, that some molds do much worse than 'a touch of the stomach flu'. The facts are that certain kinds of molds do produce toxins. They aren't fast-acting toxins that will make you sick tomorrow. But over

time low doses of these toxins are associated with liver cancers and other diseases. Who ever thought to connect moldy jelly to liver cancer decades ago?

How do we decide what to keep and what to pitch? Start with what's usual. If cheese that should have only white (Brie or Camembert) or blue (bleu cheese) mold on it suddenly has pink or green molds, pitch it. Throw away all moldy soft cheeses such as cottage cheese or yogurts too. You have no idea what those wild invading molds are doing there.

Throw out any grains and grain products that get moldy. That includes breads, cakes, cookies, crackers and pastas. Also throw out any sweets, jams and jellies, syrups, soft fruits such as peaches, melons and berries, and fruit products such as applesauce. The molds that grow best on these sugar or carbohydrate-containing foods are likely to be making toxins while they grow. Even peanuts, peanut butter and other nuts have enough carbohydrate that they should be thrown away if they get moldy.

Foods that are mostly protein or fat that get moldy can usually be trimmed. But since mold sends very fine hair-like 'roots' down into foods we need to cut away more than just the mold we can see. Hard cheese and old-fashioned country hams can be trimmed. Cut away all the mold you can see, then cut another inch deeper the whole way around.

Hard fruits and vegetables such as pumpkins, winter squash, potatoes, apples or cauliflower can be trimmed if there is just a little spot of mold. If the whole piece is soft, don't bother. A few moldy berries can be carefully picked out of the box, but use a sharp eye. Mold toxins spread through the moisture in the produce, or through the whole jar of jelly. Taking out what we can see will still leave toxins in the food. It's not worth the risk.

Don't buy produce that is all ready moldy. Keep fresh produce dry and cool. Moisture lets molds grow faster, cold makes them grow more slowly. So don't wash fruits or vegetables

until you are ready to cut or use them. Keep them refrigerated as much as possible. Even fresh fruit once it's cut up for fruit salad needs to be kept refrigerated. Yes, throwing away produce is expensive, but so is sickness. Be safe!

Here's a quick and healthy dinner recipe. Serve with brown rice and steamed broccoli. If you want a little extra flavor make part of the oil sesame oil. You can buy a tiny jar of grated ginger root, or grate some fresh. Fresh ginger will keep for several weeks in the refrigerator or several months in the freezer if it's wrapped in plastic. Throw it out if it gets moldy!

Ginger Chicken with Peppers

2 pounds boneless chicken cut in cubes	1 Tbsp cornstarch
3 Tbsp low sodium soy sauce	1 tsp vinegar (cider or white)
2 tsp sugar	4 tsp oil
1 sweet red pepper sliced thinly	1 sweet green or yellow pepper, sliced thinly
1 ½ tsp grated ginger root	¼ cup chopped peanuts

Mix cornstarch and 1 Tbsp soy sauce in small bowl until dissolved. Add chicken and mix well, set aside. In another small bowl combine rest of soy sauce, vinegar, sugar and 1 tsp oil. Set aside. Heat rest of oil in large non-stick skillet. Add pepper slices and stir-fry until limp. Add chicken, stir-fry over high heat 3 minutes. Remove from pan. Lower heat and stir-fry ginger for 2 minutes. Replace chicken and peppers in pan, cook 2 more minutes. Add soy sauce mixture, cook another minute. Add peanuts, stir and serve hot over rice. Serves 4.