

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Storing Eggs**

Have you ever pulled a carton of eggs out of the refrigerator and wondered “How long ago did I buy these?” You’re surely not alone. Since the ‘80’s when people started worrying about cholesterol in their foods the consumption of eggs has been going down. Now that the American Heart Association and other health agencies have determined that it’s the fat, not the cholesterol, in our diets that affects our blood cholesterol, eggs are off the black list. And since they’re such an inexpensive source of good quality protein, they should be making their way back onto our plates. But, just how long can you keep an egg?

The standard safety recommendations from the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is that fresh eggs can be stored in the refrigerator safely for 3 to 5 weeks. If they last that long at your house you might notice that the end of 5 weeks is past the Sell By or the Exp date on the carton. USDA says that’s okay. Actually USDA has published at least one study where they stored eggs in the refrigerator for 10 weeks. They were still safe. They still worked fine in cakes, they even made good meringue. So, as long as you keep them in the refrigerator, they’ll be good for over a couple of months.

If there’s a date code on a carton of eggs you can figure out when the eggs were packed. Since that’s usually within one day of when they were laid, you’ll know exactly how fresh they are. The code is just 3 numbers. January 1st is 001, December 31st is 365, and all the other dates are just how many days after Jan 1 they are. If there’s a

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Sell By date it can't be any more than 5 weeks after the day the eggs were packed. A producer could choose to put a shorter time, say 3 weeks, if he wanted to. But still, that's the date the eggs should be in your refrigerator, not the date they should be used.

Occasionally you might think that the eggs you get at the store don't feel very cold inside their carton. If you got really fresh eggs that could be true. The cartons have to be kept at 45° F or lower. But when an egg is laid it comes out of the chicken at about 105° F. There's no way to cool an egg to 45° F in just a day, so really fresh eggs might still be warm. Keep them refrigerated, they will cool down, and the cooler they are the longer they'll keep and the safer they will be.

If there's no date on the carton you can estimate whether they are really fresh or really old when you crack one. A fresh egg on a plate or in the frying pan will stand up high. The yolk will be rounded, the white will stick together and be thick. The older an egg is, the flatter the yolk will be and the more runny and flat the white will spread out. In a fresh raw egg you should be able to see the white string connected to the yolk. As the egg ages that white string will get thinner.

While fresh eggs certainly make prettier fried eggs, older eggs are much better for boiling. For nice smooth boiled or deviled eggs, be sure to get your eggs at least a week before you intend to cook them. The skin that holds the egg to the inside of the shell is looser when they're old, so it's easier to peel the egg. You can guess how fresh or old a boiled egg is by the size of the air bubble. A really fresh egg has practically no air bubble, so the flat spot on the end will be very small. As the egg ages the bubble and the flat spot get bigger and bigger. A big bubble can make an egg float or stand on end in a pan of water, but it's not a sign that the egg is spoiled.

Pickling eggs is a way to give them a very different flavor, and color if you choose. The easy way is to simply put peeled hard cooked eggs in a jar and pour the juice of a can of pickled red beets over them. Leave them in the refrigerator overnight, and by tomorrow you'll have pink pickled eggs. Here's a different version, slightly spicy but not colored. Add some Tabasco if you really want spice. And do keep them in the refrigerator until you're ready to eat them.

Ginger Eggs

8 peeled, hard cooked eggs

2 cups cider vinegar

1 ½ tsp powdered ginger

1 ½ tsp black pepper

1 ½ tsp ground allspice

Dash Tabasco sauce optional

Combine the vinegar and spices in a saucepan, heat to boiling and simmer for 10 minutes. Put the eggs in a large bowl or several clean jars. Allow the vinegar to cool slightly, pour over the eggs and cover the bowl or tighten lids on the jars. Store in the refrigerator for up to 7 days.