

Shelf Life of Pet Food

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In selecting a high-quality food for your pet, remember that proper handling and storage is necessary to maintain optimum taste and nutritional value.

How long can I expect the pet food I buy to last?

First of all, before you buy a bag or can of pet food, check for a 'best if used by' date on the container. Higher-quality foods will have this, and the format should be easy to read. Most dry foods have a shelf life of one year, while canned products are usually good for two years from the date of manufacture. Make sure that the pet food you are buying is within its recommended use date.

Do the types of preservatives used make a difference?

Keep in mind that the type of preservative used may affect the shelf life. Natural preservatives (such as vitamin E) tend to break down more quickly than artificial preservatives (such as ethoxyquin, BHT, and BHA). Do not be surprised if the shelf life of products using natural preservatives is several months shorter than those using artificial preservatives. You may need to compensate for this by buying pet food in smaller packages or on a more frequent basis.

How should pet food be stored?

Remember that the major sources of damage to pet food are oxygen, heat, humidity, and light. Exposure to oxygen and heat leads to oxidation of the fat in foods. Oxidation is a chemical process that makes food taste rancid, depletes vitamins and other nutrients, and can eventually lead to serious disease. Proper storage should limit the exposure of the food to these environmental factors.

Store foods at proper temperatures. Room temperature is ideal for both canned and dry foods, but neither should be stored above 90°F. Storing canned food at temperatures below 50°F for long periods of time may lead to some changes in appearance, texture, and palatability, but should not alter the nutritional value. Once canned food is opened, it should be covered with a tight-fitting lid, refrigerated, and used within 3 days.

Avoid storing dry food in damp basements, bathrooms or laundry rooms, since moisture encourages the growth of mold. If possible, keep dry food in its original bag and place inside another clean, dry, container with a snug lid to keep out light, air, rodents, and insects.

