

Contaminated Foods

Contaminated food can be a problem following any storm involving flooding.

Floodwaters can carry silt, raw sewage, oil, or chemical wastes. Bacteria in floodwater can contaminate food, making it unsafe to eat.

Inspect any food in the house after a flood. Floodwater may have covered it, dripped on it, or seeped into it. Some foods(see below) are protected by their containers. If you are in doubt about the safety of food, throw it out. Do not risk disease.

Use the following guidelines when deciding which foods to discard and which to save:

Food to Discard:

Do not attempt to save the following foods:

1. Opened containers and packages which have come in contact with floodwater.
2. Unopened jars and bottles with paper seals, such as those containing mayonnaise or salad dressing.
3. Containers of spices, seasonings, and flavorings.
4. Flour, sugar, and coffee in canisters.
5. Paper, cloth, fiber, or cardboard boxes, even if the contents seem to be dry. This includes salt, cereals, pasta products, rice, and any “sealed” packages of crackers or cookies within a larger paper box.
6. Dented, bulging, or leaking, tin cans. Cans which have been tossed about and are found far from their normal storage spot. Seams on these cans may have been weakened or their seals broken, causing contamination or spoilage.
7. Jam or jelly sealed with paraffin.
8. Containers with non-sealed, fitted lids, such as cocoa or baking powder.
9. Commercially bottled carbonated beverages, if the cap is crusted with silt.
10. Foil or cellophane packaged foods.
11. All fresh vegetables and fruits which do not have a peel, shell, or coating, that can be removed before use, such as leafy vegetables. Also, fruit with damage at the stem end that would allow water to contact the inside.

12. Fresh meat, fish, and poultry, which have been in contact with flood waters.
13. Home canned foods, even if the jar seems tightly sealed. **NOTE:** In some cases, tightly sealed home canned foods may be safe, depending on the flood conditions. If your supply of canned food is extensive, contact the Escambia County Cooperative Extension Service. The Extension Service can advise you on how to evaluate your canned goods.

Food to Use:

The following foods are safe if you wash and sanitize their containers before use. Also wash, sanitize, and peel fruits or vegetables:

14. Undamaged tin or aluminum cans. Be sure to wash and sanitize the food container BEFORE opening the can (see below).
15. Potatoes - Wash, sanitize, dry, peel, and cook before using.
16. Citrus fruits - Wash well, sanitize, and peel before using.
17. Apples and other fruits can be sanitized, peeled, and cooked before eating. Do not eat raw fruit, even if it has been sanitized.

To Disinfect Cans and Commercial Glass Jars:

All cans and commercial glass jars must be washed and sanitized before they are opened.

18. Remove labels and wash the container in a strong detergent solution. Use a scrub brush and remove all silt.
19. Immerse scrubbed containers for 15 minutes in a chlorine solution. Household bleaches contain from 2% to 6% chlorine. The amount of bleach to add to the water depends on the percent of chlorine used:

% of chlorine in bleach	Volume of bleach to add to 1 quart of water	Volume of bleach to add to 1 gallon of water
2%	3/4 tablespoon	2 tablespoons
4%	1 tablespoon	1 tablespoon
6%	_ tablespoon	3/4 tablespoon

20. Remove containers from the chlorine solution. Air-dry the containers before opening. Re-label the container if not used immediately. Use the canned food as soon as possible since the container may rust. Store containers in a clean, safe place.

21. The chlorine solution is not reusable. Make a fresh solution after each 15 minute time span.

To Disinfect Fruits and Vegetables:

22. Wash the fruit or vegetable in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush and remove all silt.

23. Soak the fruit or vegetable in a chlorine solution for 15 to 20 minutes.

24. Rinse thoroughly with safe drinking water.

25. Peel if possible and cook thoroughly before eating. Refer any specific questions to health authorities or your County Extension Agent. If in doubt, throw it out!