

Use Your Food in Time

The Expiry-First Dinner Guide: a simple way to build dinner around the food you should use first.



FIND WHAT YOU NEED

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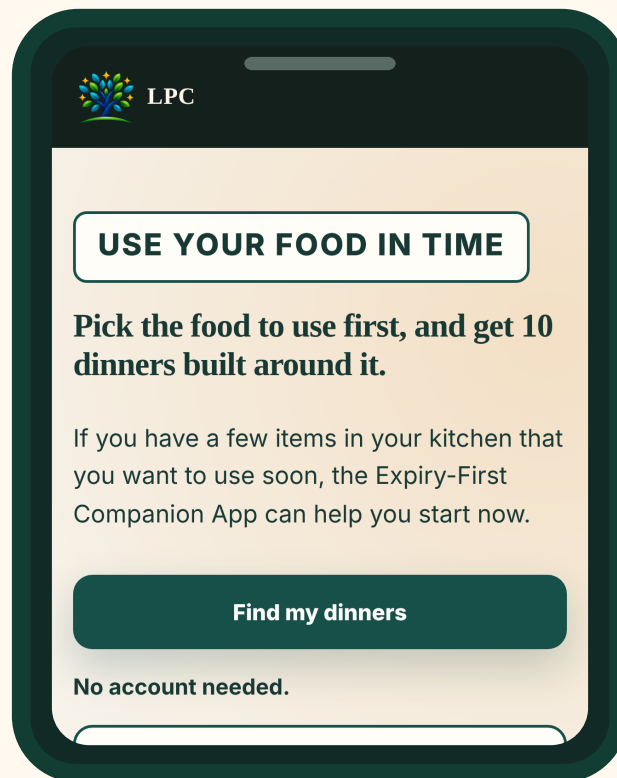
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Quick Route: Start with the Expiry-First Companion App



If you have a few items in your kitchen that you want to use soon, the Expiry-First Companion App can help you start now.

You choose 3 to 5 things from the app's list, and say how soon each one needs a plan: today, soon,

CONTINUED

or in a few days. The app gives you 10 dinners that use the first item you chose. The other items you choose may or may not be in each dinner.

Save favorites and add personal notes, so your app is tailored to your preferences.

You can create 2 complete personalized plans free.

Read the Important Note About Dinner Ideas and Food Safety first. Then use the app if you want a dinner idea tonight, or keep reading and learn the method at your own pace.

Open the Companion App

<https://usefood.lifeperksclub.com>

DINNER BLUEPRINT INDEX

Dinner Blueprint Index



This guide has 12 reusable dinner blueprints. Each one starts with the food that is waiting in your kitchen, not with a shopping list.

- Wilting spinach and egg scramble wrap

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- Soft tomato and white bean pasta

- Last-of-the-chicken fried rice

- Aging peppers and onions sheet-pan sausage

- Yogurt-rescue chickpea bowl

- Potato, carrot and cabbage skillet hash

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- Bread-heel tomato and egg toast

- Overripe banana oat pancakes

- Bagged salad and leftover rice soup

- Mushroom and spinach quesadilla

- Tuna, celery and white bean plate (no cooking)

- Wrinkly-pepper black bean tacos

You do not have to follow a blueprint to the letter. Each one is a pattern: a food to use first, a base, something to give it body and something to give it flavor. Swap what you have for what the blueprint names.

A GENTLE NOTE

Important Note About Dinner Ideas and Food Safety



This guide gives everyday dinner ideas. It is general information, not medical, nutrition or food-safety

CONTINUED

advice, and it does not replace the official sources listed at the end.

It does not promise a certain amount of food saved, money saved or a particular result in your kitchen.

It also does not tell you how long a particular food lasts. The only storage and temperature numbers in these pages come from the U.S. sources listed at

CONTINUED

the end, and each one is named next to the number.

The dates printed on most food are about quality, not safety. The one exception named by the USDA is infant formula, which should not be used after its Use-By date. You will find the details in the section on dates.

If you are not sure about a food, do not use it. That is this guide's own rule of caution, not a quote from an official source. A dinner idea is never worth a food you doubt.

[START HERE](#)

Why Food Goes Bad Before You Cook It



Food can go bad before you cook it for an ordinary reason: dinner is decided late, when we are tired, and the food that is about to turn is not the food we are looking at.

CONTINUED

A bag of spinach is bought on Sunday for a plan that changes on Tuesday. A tub of yogurt slides behind the milk. The last of the chicken sits in a container at the back, and by the time you remember it, you are not sure what to do with it.

None of this is a failure. It is what happens when the plan lives in your head and the fridge lives behind a door.

There are 3 ordinary reasons food ends up unused.

It is out of sight. The front of the fridge gets used. The back and the bottom drawers do not. Food you cannot see is food you do not plan around.

It has no job. Half a bag of salad, a spoonful of leftover rice and 2 peppers are not a dinner until

CONTINUED

someone gives them a role. Without a role, they wait.

The plan was written for another week. A meal plan made before the shopping trip does not know that Wednesday turned into takeout. The food keeps waiting for a dinner that never happened.

This guide takes a different starting point. Instead of asking "What do I feel like cooking?", you ask "What should I use first?" Then you build one dinner around the answer. It is a small change in order, not a new way of living.

The phrase expiry-first dinner means one dinner built around the item in your kitchen that you should use first, with everything else it needs coming from what you already have.

THE METHOD

What Counts as Use-First, Use-Soon and Keep



USE FIRST - USE SOON - KEEP

These 3 groups are your own plan for the week. They are not safety categories. They only tell you what to cook around first.

CONTINUED

Use first. Food you want to cook with today or tomorrow. It may be food you bought a few days ago, leftovers from earlier in the week, or an item you opened and have not touched.

Pick 1 to 3 items for this group. If everything is in this group, choose the item you most want to be rid of and treat the rest as Use soon.

Use soon. Food you want to cook with in the next few days. It still looks the way you expect, but it will not be there for long, and you would like to give it a dinner before the week ends.

CONTINUED

Keep. Everything else. Canned beans, pasta, rice, flour, oats, frozen vegetables and the things that have a long time ahead of them. They are the support cast for a dinner, not the star.

A few rules make the groups work.

Use your own judgment about what belongs where. The groups only tell you what to cook first. They do not tell you whether a food is still good to eat.

Do not move a food into Keep because you hope it will last. If you have been looking at it for a week, it is a Use first item.

CONTINUED

Do not move a food you doubt into any group. If you are not sure it is fine to eat, leave it out of the plan.

Frozen food counts too. According to the [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) cold-storage charts, a freezer should be at 0°F (-18°C) or below. Something in the freezer is a quiet Keep, and it can become a Use first item the day you decide to cook it.

You do not need labels or a spreadsheet. A shelf, a bowl or a sticky note is enough.

THE METHOD

The 4-Part Expiry-First Dinner Formula



Every blueprint in this guide follows the same 4 parts. Learn them once and you can make a dinner from almost anything.

1. The Use-First item. The star of the dinner. It is the food you picked in the sweep, and it goes into

CONTINUED

the dish in a large enough amount that it does not get lost.

2. The base. Something that carries the dish: pasta, rice, potatoes, bread, tortillas or oats. This is usually from your Keep group, and it makes the dish feel like a meal.

3. The body. Something that gives it weight: eggs, beans, chickpeas, cheese, sausage or tuna. It turns a pile of vegetables into dinner.

4. The flavor. The thing that makes it taste like it was meant to be. Garlic, onion, a spice, a squeeze of lemon, a spoonful of mustard, a dash of hot sauce, salt and pepper.

CONTINUED

The Use-First item is the 1 item from your Use first group that you cook around tonight.

Say it out loud while you look in the fridge:
"Use-First item, base, body, flavor." If you can fill all 4, dinner is decided. If you can fill 3, you are close, and the missing part is usually something small from the pantry.

There is no need to measure. These are patterns, not recipes with a fixed number of servings. Cook the amount that suits the people at your table and the food you have.

STEP BY STEP

The 5-Minute Fridge Sweep



The sweep is a short, repeatable look at what you have. It takes about 5 minutes and you can do it before you decide on dinner, or while the kettle boils.

CONTINUED

Minute 1: Look. Open the fridge and look at it the way a visitor would. Start with the back and the bottom drawers, where food hides. Then look at the door and the front.

Minute 2: Pull. Take out 3 to 5 items that you want to use first or soon. Put them on the counter. If you are not sure about an item, leave it out of the pile.

Minute 3: Sort. Make your 3 groups: Use first, Use soon and Keep. You only need to sort the pile you pulled. Everything else stays where it is.

Minute 4: Pick. Choose 1 item from Use first. This is the star for tonight. If you are stuck, choose the one you least want to look at tomorrow.

CONTINUED

Minute 5: Decide. Find a blueprint that fits, or build one with the formula: Use-First item, base, body, flavor. Then put the rest of the pile on 1 shelf, at the front, at eye level. That shelf is your Use-first shelf for the next few days.

While you have the fridge open, check the temperature if you have a fridge thermometer. The [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) guidance, in its 4 Steps to Food Safety page, says the refrigerator should be set to 40°F (4°C) or below. If it is above that, adjust the dial.

Do the sweep on the days you shop, and on the day before you shop. Those are the 2 moments when it helps most.

A GENTLE NOTE

What Food Dates Do and Do Not Tell You



Food dates are confusing, and the confusion is not your fault. Dates are not required by federal law, and they do not all mean what people think.

CONTINUED

Here is what the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) says on its Food Product Dating page.

A "Best if Used By" date is not a purchase date or a safety date. It is a quality date. It suggests when the food will taste best.

A "Use-By" date is the last date recommended for using the product while it is at peak quality. It is also not a safety date, with 1 exception: infant formula. The USDA says not to buy or use infant formula after its Use-By date.

CONTINUED

A "Sell-By" date is for the store. It tells the store how long to display the product. It is not a safety date either.

FSIS adds that food kept in a way that keeps it safe, and handled properly, should still be safe and wholesome if the date passes during home storage, until spoilage is evident. That is the official position, and it is the reason this guide treats dates as a hint about timing, not as a rule.

What does that mean in your kitchen?

CONTINUED

A date can help you decide what to cook first. A food with a date that is coming up is a good candidate for your Use first group. A date is a prompt, not a verdict.

A date does not tell you how a food was stored. The USDA's advice depends on the food being handled properly, which includes keeping it cold. A food that sat in a warm car for 3 hours is a different question from a food that has been in a 40°F fridge.

A date does not replace your own judgment. If you are not sure about a food, whatever the date says, do not use it.

And remember the exception. Infant formula is the one product the USDA singles out. Do not use it after its Use-By date.

WHERE EACH FOOD ITEM WAITS

Where Each Food Item Waits in Your Kitchen



Where food waits has a big effect on whether you cook it. You do not need more space. You need a plan for where the food you want to use first will be seen.

CONTINUED

These are our own suggestions. They are not storage rules from a source, and they do not tell you how long any food lasts.

The Use-first shelf. One shelf in the fridge, at eye level, near the front. Everything you pulled in the sweep goes here. When a new item joins the group, it goes on this shelf. When the shelf is empty, the sweep is finished.

The leftover spot. Leftovers go in clear containers on the same shelf, with a note of the day you put

CONTINUED

them in. The [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) and FSIS pages explain why the day matters: leftovers should be refrigerated within 2 hours of cooking (or within 1 hour if the temperature is above 90°F), and kept in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days. Write the day on the lid so you do not have to remember.

The counter bowl. If you already keep some produce on the counter, such as onions or bananas, keep it in 1 bowl where you can see it. A bowl of fruit and vegetables you are meant to use is a prompt.

The pantry line. Put the cans and boxes that make a dinner, such as beans, pasta, rice and canned tuna, at the front of a shelf in 1 place. When you need a base or a body, you look there first.

CONTINUED

The freezer. The [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) charts put the freezer at 0°F (-18°C) or below. Leftovers that you will not get to this week can go in the freezer. A freezer bag with a note of what is inside and the day you put it in is easier to use later.

The place you do not look. Every kitchen has one. The back of the second shelf, the bottom of the freezer, the top of the pantry. Look there once during each sweep.

You do not have to reorganize your kitchen. Choose 1 spot, put the Use-first shelf there and see how it feels for a week.

THE METHOD

The Weekly Food Reset: 4 Questions Before You Shop



The reset takes about 10 minutes, before you make a list. It is not a meal plan. It is 4 questions that help you shop for the week you are actually going to have.

CONTINUED

1. What is already waiting? Do a quick sweep of the fridge, the freezer and the pantry. Write down the 3 to 5 things you want to use first. If you do nothing else, do this.

2. What nights will we really cook? Look at your week as it is, not as you wish it would be. Count the nights that are busy, the nights with plans and the nights you will be home. Be honest about takeout.

3. Which blueprint fits each of those nights?

Pick a dinner for the nights you will cook, starting with the Use first items. You do not have to fix the order. Choose the dinners and decide on the day.

CONTINUED

4. What is the shortest list that makes them work? Write only what is missing: a base, a body, a flavor. Do not buy a new Use-First item. You already have 1.

Keep the list short. If a blueprint needs 1 thing you do not have, look at the others before you buy it. A different blueprint often fits what you have.

And leave room. A plan for 3 or 4 dinners is plenty. The other nights are for leftovers, eggs on toast and takeout, and none of those is a failure.

12 REUSABLE DINNER

12 Reusable Dinner Blueprints



Each blueprint below follows the 4-part formula: a Use-First item, a base, a body and a flavor. Each

CONTINUED

one tells you what to do in a few short steps, and says what you can swap.

The amounts are loose on purpose. Cook what suits the people at your table. The times below are our own estimates for an ordinary home kitchen, not official numbers.

Where a blueprint involves cooked meat, leftovers or sausage, it names the rule and the source in the same paragraph. The sources are listed at the end.

THE METHOD

Wilting spinach and egg scramble wrap



Use first: a bag of spinach that you opened a few days ago and have not used yet. **Base:** tortillas or flatbread. **Body:** eggs. **Flavor:** garlic, a little cheese, salt and pepper.

1. Warm a pan with a little oil and add chopped garlic for a moment.

CONTINUED

2. Add the spinach and stir for about 1 minute, until it collapses.
3. Beat the eggs, pour them in and stir gently for 2 to 3 minutes, until they are cooked through.
4. Add cheese, salt and pepper. Spoon into a warm tortilla and roll up.

Swap: any soft greens for the spinach. Beans for the eggs. Cook the eggs until the yolk and white are firm ([foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov)).

THE METHOD

Soft tomato and white bean pasta



Use first: tomatoes that have been on the counter or in the fridge for several days. **Base:** any pasta. **Body:** a can of white beans. **Flavor:** olive oil, garlic, black pepper, a handful of herbs if you have them.

CONTINUED

1. Start the pasta water. Cook the pasta as its package says.

2. Chop the tomatoes and cook them in oil with garlic for about 8 to 10 minutes, until they fall apart into a sauce.

3. Add the drained beans and a splash of the pasta water.

4. Toss with the pasta, season and serve.

Swap: a spoonful of tomato paste if the tomatoes are few. Chickpeas for the beans.

THE METHOD

Last-of-the-chicken fried rice



Use first: the last of a cooked chicken, plus leftover rice. **Base:** the leftover rice. **Body:** the chicken and an egg. **Flavor:** soy sauce, garlic, a spoonful of any chopped vegetables you have.

CONTINUED

1. Check the leftovers before you start. The USDA FSIS leftovers page says leftovers should be put in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking and used within 3 to 4 days. If yours are older, leave them out of the dish.
2. Heat oil in a wide pan. Cook garlic and chopped vegetables for about 3 minutes.
3. Add the rice and chicken and stir for about 4 minutes, until heated through.
4. Push everything to the side, scramble an egg in the space and stir it in. Add soy sauce.

CONTINUED

5. Make sure the dish reaches 165°F, measured with a food thermometer. That is the temperature FSIS gives for reheating leftovers, and [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) lists 165°F for leftovers and casseroles.

Treat the rice like any other leftover.

[Foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) names rice and leftovers among the foods that cause trouble when they sit out too long at room temperature, so put them in the refrigerator as soon as possible.

Swap: leftover pork or tofu for the chicken. Frozen peas for the vegetables.

THE METHOD

Aging peppers and onions sheet-pan sausage



Use first: peppers and onions that have been in the fridge for a while. **Base:** potatoes cut small, or

CONTINUED

bread on the side. **Body:** sausage. **Flavor:** olive oil, paprika or dried herbs, salt.

1. Heat the oven to 425°F (220°C), our own suggestion. Cut the peppers, onions and potatoes into similar pieces and toss them with oil and seasoning on a pan.

2. Add the sausage and put the pan in the oven.

3. Turn the pieces once or twice. Cook for about 25 to 30 minutes, until the vegetables are soft and the sausage is done.

CONTINUED

4. Check the sausage with a food thermometer.

Foodsafety.gov's safe minimum temperature chart gives 160°F for pork or beef sausage and 165°F for poultry sausage, so check which kind you have.

This blueprint assumes raw sausage. For sausage that is already cooked, follow its package.

The app's list does not include sausage. Treat this blueprint as a pattern: swap in a body you have.

Swap: plant-based sausage, following its package. Carrots for the potatoes.

THE METHOD

Yogurt-rescue chickpea bowl



Use first: plain yogurt that you want to use soon. **Base:** rice, couscous or toasted bread. **Body:** a can of chickpeas. **Flavor:** lemon, garlic, cumin or paprika, salt.

CONTINUED

1. Warm the chickpeas in a pan with a little oil and spice for about 5 minutes, until they take on some color.
2. Stir lemon juice, a little grated garlic and salt into the yogurt to make a sauce.
3. Put the base in a bowl, add the chickpeas and spoon over the yogurt sauce.
4. Add chopped cucumber, tomato or any fresh vegetable you have.

CONTINUED

The name says "rescue", but it means a quality question, not a safety one. Use yogurt that you would be comfortable eating. If you are not sure about it, leave it out.

The app's list does not include yogurt. Treat this blueprint as a pattern and use it with what you have.

Swap: white beans for the chickpeas. A pinch of chili if you like heat.

THE METHOD

Potato, carrot and cabbage skillet hash



Use first: the soft potatoes, carrots and the last of a cabbage. **Base:** the potatoes. **Body:** an egg on top, or beans stirred in. **Flavor:** onion, mustard, black pepper, a little vinegar.

CONTINUED

1. Dice the potatoes small so they cook quickly, and put them in a heavy pan with oil. Cover for a few minutes, then uncover.
2. Add onion, carrot and cabbage, cut into small pieces.
3. Stir now and then for about 15 minutes, until everything is browned and soft.
4. Season with mustard, pepper and a splash of vinegar. Top with a fried egg, cooked until the yolk and white are firm.

Swap: any root vegetable. Sausage that is already cooked, heated as its package says, or beans for the egg.

THE METHOD

Bread-heel tomato and egg toast



Use first: the heel of a loaf, and a tomato. **Base:** toasted bread. **Body:** eggs. **Flavor:** olive oil, garlic, salt and pepper.

1. Toast the bread. Rub the surface with a cut clove of garlic.

CONTINUED

2. Cook the eggs until the yolk and white are firm.

3. Slice or crush the tomato on the toast, drizzle with oil and season.

4. Put the egg on top.

Swap: a spoonful of beans or a slice of cheese for body. Any ripe tomato or a handful of herbs.

THE METHOD

Overripe banana oat pancakes



Use first: bananas that have been on the counter for several days. **Base:** rolled oats, blended or left whole. **Body:** an egg, or a spoonful of yogurt. **Flavor:** cinnamon, a pinch of salt, a little vanilla if you have it.

1. Mash the bananas in a bowl.

CONTINUED

2. Stir in the oats, the egg and the flavorings until you have a thick batter.

3. Heat a pan with a little oil or butter and drop spoonfuls of the batter in.

4. Cook for about 2 to 3 minutes, until browned on 1 side, then turn and cook until browned on the other.

Pancakes are not only for breakfast. They make an easy dinner on a night when nothing else will work.

The app's list does not include bananas or oats. Treat this blueprint as a pattern and use it with what you have.

Swap: a spoonful of peanut butter in the batter. Sliced fruit or yogurt on top.

THE METHOD

Bagged salad and leftover rice soup



Use first: a bag of salad leaves that you want to use soon. **Base:** leftover rice. **Body:** an egg, beans

CONTINUED

or a little leftover cooked meat. **Flavor:** garlic, soy sauce or salt, a little chili if you like.

1. Check the leftover rice and meat against the leftovers rule: refrigerated within 2 hours of cooking and used within 3 to 4 days (USDA FSIS, Leftovers and Food Safety). If they are older, leave them out.

2. Heat broth or water in a pot with garlic for about 5 minutes.

CONTINUED

3. Add the rice and the meat or beans. Heat for about 5 minutes, until it is steaming hot all the way through. FSIS says leftovers should reach 165°F, measured with a food thermometer.

4. Stir in the salad leaves just before serving, so that they wilt but do not disappear. Season.

The app's list does not include bagged salad. Treat this blueprint as a pattern and use it with what you have.

Swap: a spoonful of miso for the soy sauce. Any leafy vegetable for the salad.

THE METHOD

Mushroom and spinach quesadilla



Use first: mushrooms and spinach that you want to use soon. **Base:** tortillas. **Body:** cheese. **Flavor:** onion, garlic, pepper, a little paprika.

1. Cook sliced onion and mushrooms in a dry or lightly oiled pan until they are browned and the liquid has gone.

CONTINUED

2. Add garlic and spinach and stir for about 1 minute, until the spinach wilts.

3. Put a tortilla in a pan, cover half with cheese and the vegetables, and fold it over.

4. Cook for about 3 minutes on each side, until crisp and golden. Cut into wedges.

Swap: beans for the cheese. Peppers for the mushrooms.

THE METHOD

Tuna, celery and white bean plate



Use first: celery that has been in the fridge for a while. **Base:** a slice of bread, crackers or a few leaves. **Body:** canned tuna and white beans. **Flavor:** lemon, olive oil, black pepper, a little mustard.

1. Chop the celery small.

CONTINUED

2. Mix the tuna, beans and celery with oil, lemon, mustard and pepper.

3. Serve on a plate with bread or crackers, or on salad leaves.

There is no cooking in this one. It is for the night when you do not want to cook.

The app's list does not include celery. Treat this blueprint as a pattern and use it with what you have.

Swap: chickpeas for the beans. Chopped onion for the celery.

THE METHOD

Wrinkly-pepper black bean tacos



Use first: peppers that are wrinkled. **Base:** tortillas. **Body:** a can of black beans. **Flavor:** cumin, garlic, lime or lemon, salt.

1. Slice the peppers and cook them in a pan with oil until soft.

CONTINUED

2. Add garlic and drained beans, with a splash of water, and cook until the beans are hot and a little creamy.

3. Season with cumin, lime juice and salt.

4. Spoon into warm tortillas and add cheese, yogurt or salsa.

Swap: corn or any soft vegetable for the peppers.

HOW TO ADAPT A DINNER

How to Adapt a Dinner Blueprint



The blueprints are a starting point. When your kitchen does not match, change the blueprint, not the kitchen.

Swap the Use-First item. The tomatoes, the greens and the celery from your Use first group all

CONTINUED

play the same role. If the blueprint names spinach and you have chard, use chard.

Swap the base. Rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, tortillas and oats are all bases. If you have a different one, use it.

Swap the body. Eggs, beans, chickpeas, cheese, tuna, sausage and leftover meat are all bodies. If you do not eat one, choose another.

Change the flavor. The flavor makes the dish. A little garlic, a squeeze of lemon, a spoonful of mustard or a pinch of a spice you like can turn the same food into a different dinner.

CONTINUED

Cut the amount. If you have only half of what a blueprint needs, make half. A small dinner is still a dinner.

Keep the safety rules. If you change a blueprint, keep the rules attached to it. If it uses leftovers, they still need to be refrigerated within 2 hours of cooking and used within 3 to 4 days (USDA FSIS).

If it uses sausage or poultry, it still needs to reach the temperature on the [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) chart: 160°F for pork or beef sausage and 165°F for poultry.

Use the freezer. If you cannot cook the dish tonight, you can sometimes freeze the leftovers. FSIS gives 3 to 4 months for leftovers in the freezer. They stay safe longer than that, but can lose moisture and flavor. Write the day on the bag.

WHERE TO START

When Your Dinner Plan Falls Apart



It will. The blueprint takes more time than you have, the Use-first item is worse than you hoped, or a night out replaces a night in. This is normal.

Here is what to do.

CONTINUED

If you run out of time: pick the blueprint with no cooking, like the tuna, celery and white bean plate. Or make toast with eggs. Dinner does not have to be impressive to count.

If the Use-First item is not good: if you are not sure whether it is fine to eat, do not use it. That is not a failure of the plan. Put it aside and choose the next item on the shelf.

If you did not cook: the food is still there tomorrow. Move the item to the front of the shelf. The sweep will pick it up.

CONTINUED

If you have too much: cook what suits the table. Put the rest in a clear container with the day on it. FSIS says leftovers should go in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking, within 1 hour if it is hotter than 90°F, and be used within 3 to 4 days.

If you forgot about food: it happens. Start with what is in front of you now. Do a 5-minute sweep and choose 1 item.

If you are tired of the whole idea: stop for a night. Use takeout or cereal. Come back to the sweep another day.

The aim is not a perfect kitchen. The aim is to look at what you have before you decide what to cook, as often as you can.

MAKE NEXT WEEK'S DINNERS

Make Next Week's Dinners Easier



A few small habits make the next sweep easier. You do not need all of them. Pick 1.

Write the day on leftovers. A strip of tape and a pen are enough. The day tells you what to cook first.

CONTINUED

Keep the Use-first shelf. Put it in the same place each week, so you look there without thinking.

Do the sweep before you shop. A 5-minute look in the fridge before you leave the house is a good moment to see what you already have.

Buy for 3 or 4 dinners, not 7. Leave room for leftovers and for the nights that will change.

Stock a few Keep items. Canned beans, pasta, rice and tortillas make most blueprints possible. They

CONTINUED

are the base and the body for the nights when the Use-First item is small.

Keep your fridge cold. The [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) guidance says 40°F or below.

Put your own notes where you will see them. A note about what worked, what the family liked and what to try next is more useful than a rule. The companion app lets you save these.

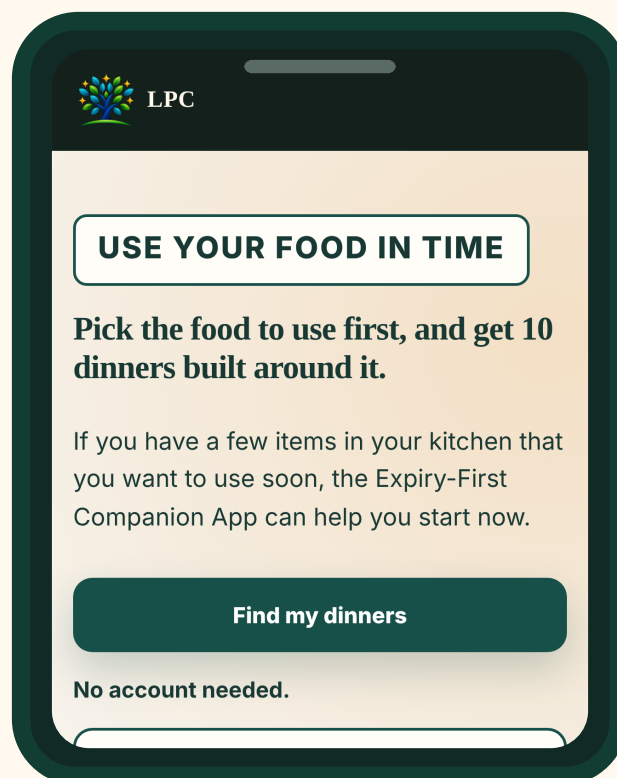
You are building a habit of looking first and deciding second. That habit is the whole method.

OPTIONAL COMPANION APP

The Expiry-First Companion App

This guide explains the method. The Expiry-First Companion App turns it into a dinner for tonight.

You choose 3 to 5 things from the app's list, and say how soon each one needs a plan: today, soon,



CONTINUED

or in a few days. The app gives you 10 dinners from its dinner database, which follows the same 4 parts as this guide, and the first item you chose is in every one.

The other items you choose may or may not be in each dinner. If something you have is not on the list, use the blueprints in this guide as patterns and swap in what you have.

Save favorites and add personal notes, so your app is tailored to your preferences.

You can create 2 complete personalized plans free. After that, a one-time unlock of \$9 keeps it yours. There is no subscription and no renewal.

Open the Companion App

<https://usefood.lifeperksclub.com>

FINAL CHECKLIST

Final Checklist: Use Your Food in Time



☐ I did a 5-minute sweep and pulled 3 to 5 items.

☐ I sorted them into Use first, Use soon and Keep.

☐ I chose 1 item to be the star of tonight's dinner.

CONTINUED

- ☐ I filled the 4 parts: Use-First item, base, body, flavor.
- ☐ My refrigerator is at 40°F or below.
- ☐ I will refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours of cooking, and use them within 3 to 4 days.
- ☐ I will cook poultry to 165°F and pork or beef sausage to 160°F, measured with a food thermometer.
- ☐ I did not use a food I was unsure about.
- ☐ I know that most dates on food are about quality, not safety, and that infant formula is the exception.

The phrase expiry-first dinner means one dinner built around the item in your kitchen that you should use first.

SOURCES

Sources Used for Food Safety and Storage Guidance

The numbers and rules in this guide come from U.S. public health sources. They were read on October 4 and 5, 2026. Check the official pages for the latest wording.

The Use-first, Use-soon and Keep groups, the 5-minute sweep, the Use-first shelf, the weekly reset, the 4-part formula and the 12 blueprints are our own suggestions. They are not official guidance. Where a blueprint involves temperatures

CONTINUED

or leftovers, the rule comes from the sources below.

This guide gives no storage times for single foods, because the sources we used do not give them.

- USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Product Dating — "Best if Used By", "Use-By" and "Sell-By" are not safety dates, except for infant formula.
<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>

CONTINUED

- [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts), Cold Food Storage Charts (last updated September 19, 2023) — refrigerator at 40°F (4°C) or below; freezer at 0°F (-18°C) or below.
<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts>
- [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety), 4 Steps to Food Safety (last reviewed September 18, 2023) — refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours; refrigerator at 40°F or below.
<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/4-steps-to-food-safety>
- USDA FSIS, Leftovers and Food Safety (July 31, 2020; an older page) — refrigerate within 2 hours (1 hour above 90°F); use within 3 to 4 days; reheat to 165°F; freezer 3 to 4 months. <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/leftovers-and-food-safety>

CONTINUED

- foodsafety.gov, Bacteria and Viruses, Bacillus cereus (August 14, 2025) — rice and leftovers that sit out too long at room temperature; refrigerate as soon as possible.

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-poisoning/bacteria-and-viruses>

- foodsafety.gov, Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures (last reviewed November 21, 2024) — poultry 165°F; ground meat and sausage 160°F; leftovers and casseroles 165°F.

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-internal-temperatures>

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