

From Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens:

At some times of the year you'll have more eggs than you can use, while at other times you'll have too few. it becomes logical to preserve surplus eggs in times of plenty to use in times of need.

Throughout the ages, different means have been devised to prolong the storage life of eggs. The ancient Chinese stored them for years in various materials ranging from clay to wood ashes to cooked rice. You probably wouldn't want to eat one of those eggs, with its greenish yolk and gelatinous brown albumen.

In modern times, many options have been developed for preserving eggs. Although none is an outright substitute for cold storage, these methods can let you extend shelf life. They also offer short-term ways to prolong storage without electricity, which can be handy if you live in or are planning a trip to the outback. Even in the back woods, you can often take advantage of a cold running stream or an ice bank to keep eggs fresh. Many cellars offer suitable egg storage conditions. The cooler the temperature, the longer eggs will keep without spoiling.

Eggs can be safely stored for the short term (two to three months) at temperatures up to 55 degrees F (13 degrees C), where the relative humidity is close to 75 percent. The moisture level is important since at low humidities eggs dry out and at high humidities they get moldy. If the storage area is damp, mold on the shells needs to be wiped off before the eggs are used. A little air circulation helps retard mold growth.

At 30 degrees F (-1 degree C) eggs will keep for as long as nine months. The temperature must not get below 28 degrees F (-2 degrees C), though, or the eggs will freeze and burst their shells. Relative humidity of 85 percent is best for long-term storage. To

prevent mold growth and condensation, seal egg cartons in plastic bags. To minimize drying out at lower humidities, use thermostabilization, oil, or water glass, as described later.

Preserve only eggs with clean uncracked shells. Dirty eggs that have been cleaned by washing or dry buffing do not keep well under prolonged storage. Given the infinite number of combinations of possible temperature and humidity conditions, it's not possible to list definitive storage times under all conditions. The longer you store eggs, the more likely they are to develop a stale or off flavor that makes them less suited for breakfast than for use in receipes.

Refrigeration:

Refrigeration is often the quickest, most convenient way to store eggs. On the lowest shelf, where the temperature is coolest, eggs in a closed carton will keep for up to five weeks. The biggest problem with a household refrigerator is its low humidity, especially in a self-defrosting model. If you wrap egg cartons in plastic bags to prevent moisture loss (as well as absorption of flavors from other foods), you can refrigerate eggs for two months. Eggs on an egg rack on the door won't last long due to jostling, blasts of warm air whenever the door is closed, and lost moisture.

If you use only whites or yolks for a receipe, you can refrigerate leftover whites in a tightly covered container for up to four days. Cover leftover yolks with cold water and use them within two days.

Freezing:

Freezing lets you keep eggs longer than any other method--up to one year at 0 degrees F (-18 degrees C). Freeze only raw eggs; hard-cooked eggs will turn rubbery. Since eggs that are frozen intact

will expand and burst their shells, the shells must be removed. You may store eggs either whole or with the whites and yolks separated. To keep yolks or whole eggs from getting gummy, add sugar or salt, depending on how you plan to use them. Freeze the eggs in ice cube trays or in freezer containers.

Eggs that have been frozen in ice cube trays should be removed and wrapped in heavy freezer paper or plastic bags. To compare the size of a frozen cube with the normal size of an egg (or its yolk or white), use a measuring spoon to determine how much each slot in the tray holds, then consult the accompanying "Frozen Egg Equivalents" chart. If you use metal trays with removable grids, measure the total amount the tray holds and divide by the number of cubes per tray.

For use in recipes calling for several eggs, freeze eggs (or yolks or whites) in air-tight freezer containers, each holding just enough for one recipe. Leave a little head space to allow for expansion, otherwise the lid may pop or the container may split. Place a square of freezer paper on top of the eggs to minimize the formation of ice crystals. Label each container with the date, contents, and recipe for which it is intended.

To store whole eggs, break the contents into a bowl, stir just enough to blend the yolks with the whites (taking care not to whip in air), and press the eggs through a sieve to break up the thick albumen. you can get by without sugar or salt if the whites and yolks are thoroughly mixed. Otherwise, to each cup of eggs add 1/2 tsp. salt (for a main dish) or 1/2 Tbsp. honey, corn syrup or sugar (for a dessert). Pour the mixture into trays or containers for freezing.

If you prefer, carefully separate the whites from the yolks, taking care to avoid getting any yolk into the whites, so the whites can be whipped later. Press the whites through a sieve to break up the

thick albumen, and freeze them in trays or containers. Thawed whites can be whipped just like fresh ones if you let them warm to room temperature for 30 minutes before beating them.

Separated yolks need sugar or salt to prevent gumminess. Add either 1/8 tsp salt or 1/2 Tbsp honey, corn syrup, or sugar per 4 yolks (approximately 1/4 cup or 60 ml). Freeze the yolks in ice cube trays or air-tight containers.

Thaw only as many frozen eggs as you can use within three days. Thaw them overnight in the refrigerator or in air-tight containers placed in cool water, 50 to 60 degrees F (10 to 16 degrees C). Use thawed eggs only in foods that will be thoroughly cooked.

Frozen egg equivalents:

- 2 Tbsp thawed white = 1 large fresh white
- 1 Tbsp thawed yolk = 1 large fresh yolk
- 3 Tbsp thawed whole egg = 1 large fresh egg

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