

ALL ABOUT EGGS

How to Buy and Store Eggs

Freshness



Egg cartons are marked with both a sell-by date and a pack date. The pack date is the day the eggs were graded and packed, which is generally within a week of being laid but, legally, may be as much as 30 days later. The pack date is printed on egg cartons as a three-number code just below the sell-by date and it runs consecutively from 001, for January 1, to 365, for December 31. The sell-by date is the legal limit until which eggs may be sold and is within 30 days of the pack date. In short, a carton may be up to two months old by the sell-by date. Even so, according to the USDA, eggs are still fit for consumption for an additional three to five weeks past the sell-by date if refrigerated. We tasted two- and three-month-old eggs and found them palatable. At four months, the white was loose and the yolk tasted of the refrigerator, though it was still edible. Our advice? Use your discretion. If the eggs smell odd or display discoloration, pitch them. Older eggs also lack the structure-lending properties of fresh eggs, so beware when baking.

Color



The shell's hue depends on the breed of the chicken. The run-of-the-mill Leghorn chicken produces the typical white egg. Brown-feathered birds, such as Rhode Island Reds, produce café au lait-colored eggs. Our tests proved that shell color has no effect on flavor or nutritional value.

Farm-Fresh and Organic



In our taste tests, farm-fresh eggs were standouts. The large yolks were bright orange and sat high above the comparatively small whites. Their flavor was rich and complex. The organic eggs followed in second place, while eggs from hens raised on a vegetarian diet came in third and standard supermarket eggs last. Differences were easily detected in egg-based dishes but not in cakes or cookies.

Egg Sizes



Eggs vary in size, which will make a difference in recipes. We use large eggs in our recipes. If you do the math, you can substitute one size for another. For instance, four jumbo eggs are equivalent to five large eggs (both weigh 10 ounces).

Approximate Weights of Various Egg Sizes

Medium: 1.75 ounces
Large: 2.00 ounces

Extra-Large: 2.25 ounces
Jumbo: 2.50 ounces

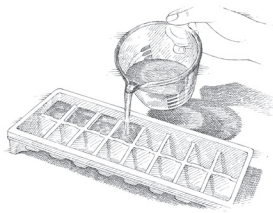
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Refrigeration

If your refrigerator has an egg tray on the door, don't use it. Eggs should be stored on the shelf, where the temperature is below 40 degrees. The average door temperature in our test kitchen refrigerators is closer to 45 degrees. Eggs are also best stored in their protective cardboard carton; when removed they may absorb flavors from other foods. The egg carton also helps maintain humidity, which is ideally 70 to 80 percent, and thus slows down evaporation of the eggs' contents.



Freezing

Extra whites can be frozen, but in our tests we found their rising properties compromised: Angel food cake didn't rise quite as well and meringues baked up deflated and a bit gummy. Frozen whites are best used in recipes that call for small amounts (like an egg wash) or recipes that don't depend on whipping the egg whites (such as an omelet). Yolks, however, can't be frozen as is; the water forms ice crystals that disrupt the protein network. Adding sugar syrup (2 parts sugar to 1 part water) allows yolks to be frozen. Stir a scant 1/4 teaspoon of syrup per yolk into yolks before freezing. Defrost and use in custards.