

## Spring Cleaning Your Kitchen

Spring is a good time for cleaning. Don't forget to clean the refrigerator and pantry.

These are some recommendations shared by Penn State Extension. Since we use these areas for storage, they can be harder to clean, but neglecting them can cause harm to you and your family. Even if your kitchen appears to be clean on the surface, harmful bacteria can be present, even though you cannot see or smell it.

Clean the inside of your refrigerator weekly. Look through your refrigerator for any unnoticed spills and clean them with hot soapy water, rinse with a wet cloth, then dry. It is best to use single-use paper towels instead of kitchen towels so you can throw them away when done. It is not recommended to use harsh chemicals inside of your refrigerator due to the risk of contaminating other foods with chemical residue. Check condiments or any other items that have been in your refrigerator for long periods of time and throw away anything that has passed its us-by date.

Spring is a good time to also check the pantry for items pasted their use-by-dates. Throw away any items past this date, including spices. Over time, spices will lose their potency and the flavor that they were intended to have. Remove everything from the pantry so that you can clean each shelf. Check cans and throw out any that are leaking, rusted, dented or bulging.

When placing things back into the pantry, put items that have closer use-by dates in the front, and items with later use-by or best-by dates in the back to avoid waste. "Use-by" dates indicate that perishable products should be consumed by the date listed on the package or discarded once the date has passed. "Best-by" dates inform shoppers that after the specified date, the shelf-stable products are safe to use or consume but have exceeded the window for optimal taste or performance.

Use the spring season to set a goal of wasting less food by checking your refrigerator and pantry often for use-by dates. In the future, try to clean out your refrigerator at least once a week, but clean your countertops daily. Regularly clean other kitchen surfaces such as appliances, cutting boards and utensils to keep them safe from illness-causing bacteria. When cleaning counters and surfaces, start with hot soapy water. Once the surfaces are clen, you can disinfect them with diluted chlorine bleach solutions. Follow the guidelines on the bottle for the right concentration for kitchen surfaces. Once you apply this solution, allow the surfaces to air dry.