

Fresh Beef Packaging Guide



WHAT'S INSIDE:
Tips on beef packaging, beef colour and storage

Fresh beef comes in a variety of packaging options at the meat counter. Each option has its advantages, depending on how you want to use or store the beef. Regardless of the packaging type, all fresh beef at the grocery store is produced under strict safety standards. Always look for the Best Before date to determine when at the very latest you need to use or freeze the beef. Some packaging types keep beef fresh longer than others (see our storage guide on the last page). Once the package is opened, ground beef must be used within one day and steaks and roasts within 2 to 3 days.

Overwrap Packaging

Beef overwrapped with a plastic wrap is the most familiar and traditional way of packaging fresh beef. Since small amounts of air can still pass through the plastic film, overwrapped fresh beef is the most perishable and will need to be used or frozen within the shortest period of time. If you wish to freeze the beef without opening the package, wrap it first with foil or place it into a sealed freezer bag.

Features:

- Traditional packaging
- Widely available



Overwrap Packaging

Modified Atmosphere Packaging

Modified Atmosphere Packaging helps fresh beef keep longer. With this type of packaging, the air surrounding the beef is adjusted (modified) and the product is then sealed airtight so it stays fresh longer. Nothing is added to the beef itself. Once the package is opened, ground beef must be used within a day and steaks and roasts within 2 to 3 days.

MAP's airtight seal prevents leaks and makes the package less messy to open. The flat shape also makes the package stackable so it's easier to store. If you want to freeze the beef that comes in this type of pack, the meat needs to be repackaged to avoid freezer burn and off-flavours from developing. Open the package and transfer meat into a sealable freezer bag. Force out as much air as possible, seal and freeze.

Features:

- Stays fresh longer
- Easy to open
- Leak-proof
- Stackable



Modified Atmosphere Packaging

The Question of Colour

Contrary to popular belief, the colour of beef is not a reliable indicator of freshness. In its initial state, beef is a deep purple colour. As it is exposed to oxygen in the air, the pigment turns cherry red. That same beef can turn purple again if oxygen is removed. The perfect example is vacuum-packaged beef.

With certain packaging types, that initial cherry red pigment will begin to take on a slightly brown hue quite quickly. The meat is still fresh and safe to eat, but just not as bright a red as when it was first exposed to oxygen. The Best Before date is still the best way to know if your fresh beef needs to be prepared and eaten right away or frozen.

Some ground beef can be brownish in the centre. This is because the small amount of oxygen present in the centre gives the meat pigment a brownish hue. However, the meat remains fresh and safe to eat up to its Best Before date.



Tube Packaging

Tube-shaped packaging (like the type used for cookie dough) is sometimes used to package ground beef. With this packaging, ground beef is kept fresh longer simply by squeezing out the air and making the package and the seal airtight. Just check the Best Before date and you are ready to plan meals days in advance! Due to the lack of contact with air, meat is often purplish when the package is opened. However, within minutes after opening it turns red. Once the package is opened, ground beef must be used within one day.

Ground beef in tube packaging is compact and easy to store in both the fridge and freezer because it contains no air and very little packaging material.



Tube Packaging

Features:

- Stays fresh longer
- Compact
- Leak-proof
- Freezer-ready



Opening the package is a breeze and no mess.

Vacuum Packaging

With Vacuum Packaging all the air is removed from the package. This package allows beef to stay fresh even longer. It offers the additional convenience of being freezer-ready – there is no need to overwrap or bag before freezing. Once the vacuum seal is broken, ground beef must be used within a day and steaks and roasts within 2 to 3 days.



Vacuum-packaged beef is purple in colour. This is normal because there is no air in the package (nothing is added to the meat).

Features:

- Stays fresh longer
- Leak-proof
- Freezer-ready



Vacuum-packaged beef turns red again after the package is opened.

Storage Guide

This storage guide compares the typical storage length of the four packaging types. The storage length ranges from a few days (short) to a few weeks (long). However, always check the Best Before date to determine when you need to use or freeze the beef.

	TYPICAL FRIDGE STORAGE LENGTH	FREEZER-READY
OVERWRAP PACKAGING		No ❌
MODIFIED ATMOSPHERE PACKAGING		No ❌
TUBE PACKAGING		Yes ✅
VACUUM PACKAGING		Yes ✅

Best Before Date and Fridge Storage: The Best Before date is printed on the product label or package itself. It is the surest way of knowing how long you can store the meat unopened in the fridge. Once the package is opened, it is best to use ground beef within a day and steaks and roasts within 2 to 3 days.

Some stores may carry beef in overwrap packaging carrying a Packaged On date. Other stores may wrap meat in scale paper at their full-service meat counter. In both cases it is best to use ground beef within a day and steaks and roasts within 3 days.



Recommended fridge temperature: 4°C (40°F) or lower as measured by an appliance thermometer

Freezer Storage

Ground Beef: 2-3 months

Steaks and Roasts: 6-12 months

Recommended freezer temperature: -18°C (0°F) or lower as measured by an appliance thermometer



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