

MOLDY FOODS

When to Use, When to Discard

When you see mold on food, is it safe to cut off the moldy part and use the rest? To find the answer to this question, look beneath the surface of food to where molds take root.

How it Grows: Mold requires only minimal moisture and air to grow. For the first 2 to 3 days, most molds look white. The surface mold you see is just the tip of the iceberg. When a food shows heavy mold growth, such as fuzzy green dots on bread and white dust on Cheddar, “root” threads have invaded it deeply. A few molds, in the right conditions, produce “mycotoxins,” poisonous substances that can make you sick.

While most molds prefer warmer temperatures, they can grow at refrigerator temperatures, too. Molds also can survive in salt and sugar better than most other food invaders. So you may find mold in refrigerated jams (high sugar content) and in cured, salty meats like ham, bacon, and salami.

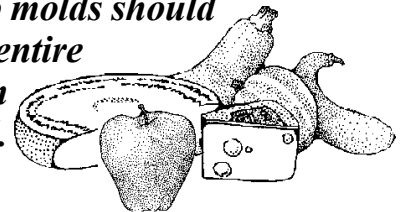
Are Any Food Molds Beneficial? Yes, molds are used to make certain kinds of cheeses and can be on the surface (Brie and Camembert) or are developed internally (Roquefort and blue.) The molds used to manufacture aged and flavored cheeses are safe to eat.

General Advice When You See Moldy Food:

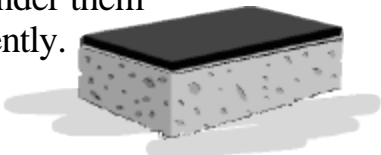
Clean the inside of your refrigerator with hot, soapy water regularly and discard any moldy foods. Mold spores from infected food can build up in your refrigerator thus shortening the life of other foods.



Discard most moldy foods. You can sometimes save hard cheese, and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mold out, but if mold growth is extensive, throw the food away. *Anyone who is allergic to molds should discard the entire food item containing mold.*



Keep mold spreaders, such as dishcloths and sponges clean. A musty smell means they're moldy. Launder them frequently.



Uncovered foods that are left out of the refrigerator are exposed to mold spores in the air. To help prevent mold contamination, cover foods.



Use the chart below to decide when to use and when to discard moldy food.

FOOD	HANDLING	REASON
Luncheon meats, bacon, or hot dogs	Discard	Foods with high moisture content can be contaminated below the surface. Moldy foods may also have bacteria growing along with the mold.
Cooked casseroles	Discard	Foods with high moisture content can be contaminated below the surface. Moldy foods may also have bacteria growing along with the mold
Cooked grain and pasta	Discard	Foods with high moisture content can be contaminated below the surface. Moldy foods may also have bacteria growing along with the mold.
Hard cheese (not cheese where mold is part of the processing)	Use. Cut off at least 1 inch around and below the mold spot (keep the knife out of the mold itself so it will not cross-contaminate other parts of the cheese). After trimming off the mold, re-cover the cheese in fresh wrap.	Mold generally cannot penetrate deep into the product.
Cheese made with mold (such as Roquefort, blue, Gorgonzola, Stilton, Brie, Camembert)	Discard soft cheeses such as Brie and Camembert if they contain molds that are not a part of the manufacturing process. If surface mold is on hard cheeses such as Gorgonzola and Stilton, cut off mold at least 1 inch around and below the mold spot and handle like hard cheese (above).	Molds that are not a part of the manufacturing process can be dangerous.
Soft cheese (such as cottage, cream cheese, Neufchatel, chevre, Bel Paese, etc.) Crumbled, shredded, and sliced cheeses (all types)	Discard	Foods with high moisture content can be contaminated below the surface. Shredded, sliced, or crumbled cheese can be contaminated by the cutting instrument. Moldy soft cheese can also have bacteria growing along with the mold.
Yogurt and sour cream	Discard	Foods with high moisture content can be contaminated below the surface. Moldy foods may also have bacteria growing along with the mold.
Jams and jellies	Discard	The mold could be producing a mycotoxin. Microbiologists recommend against scooping out the mold and using the remaining condiment.
Fruits and vegetables, firm	Use. Cut off at least 1 inch around and below the mold spot (keep the knife out of the mold itself so it will not cross-contaminate other parts of the produce).	Small mold spots can be cut off fruits and vegetables with low moisture content (cabbage, bell peppers, carrots, etc.). It's difficult for mold to penetrate dense foods.
Fruits and vegetables, soft	Discard	Fruits and vegetables with high moisture content (cucumbers, peaches, tomatoes, etc.) can be contaminated below the surface.
Bread and baked goods	Discard	Porous foods can be contaminated below the surface.

Source: Adapted from Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide, FDA and Food Safety Focus, 4/02, USDA. [6/02]

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