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SUMMER BUYS



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how long do things last?

Your A-to-Z guide to the shelf life of everyday essentials—plus how to get more out of them.

A LOE VERA GEL

12 MONTHS

Once the bottle is open, vitamins and minerals start to lose potency, and will do so even faster if exposed to air and sunlight, says Kristina Goldenberg, a dermatologist in New York City. Cap tightly and store in a closet. Even better, leave it in the fridge: It'll feel great spread on sun-parched skin.

B ULBS

10 TO 15 YEARS

Daffodils, certain tulips, crocus, Spanish and English bluebells, and grape hyacinths are likely to bloom annually as long as you fertilize in the fall and water well in the spring, says David Salzman, founder and chief horticulturist of High Country Gardens, a mail-order company. Ditto for dahlias, gladiolus, and canna lilies, though their bulbs need to be dug up and stored before the first frost.



C AST-IRON PAN GENERATIONS!

"Because cast iron is porous, water is its enemy, so avoid soaking the pan for an extended time and pat dry completely to avoid rust," says Kelly Peterson, a development specialist at Lodge Cast Iron. Let the pan cool to room temperature before cleaning; a sudden immersion in warm or cold water could cause cracks. For gentle cleaning, stick with warm water and a nonscratch nylon scrub brush.

D ELI MEAT

UP TO 5 DAYS

If turkey, ham, and roast beef don't come in a container or a zip-top bag, transfer them to one (and mark the expiration

date)—you want to lock out moisture that can speed up spoilage. Also, use that deli meat drawer in your fridge, says Archie Magoulas, a USDA food safety specialist: "It prevents a rush of warmer air every time the fridge gets opened."

E XTERIOR PAINT JOB

UP TO 10 YEARS

The key to an enduring paint job: wood that's well-prepped, says Steve Skodak, executive director of Painting and Decorating Contractors of America. That often involves power washing, scraping off old peeling paint, and sanding—so new paint best bonds to the surface. The quality of the paint also plays into longevity, as does the color; lighter hues tend to fare better than darker ones, since they're less vulnerable to sun fade. Painted brick and painted siding (vinyl and aluminum) require similar prep.

