

Ground Beef Basics – Purchase to Plate

Purchasing Ground Beef

- Ground beef packages are labeled according to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) standards and by supermarket preferences. Lean to fat ratios vary. The information on the labels will be expressed % lean, % fat. However, if a package is labeled ground beef, it must be no more than 30% fat.
- Look for fresh ground beef with a bright, cherry-red color. A darker, purplish-red color is typical of vacuum-packaged ground beef or the interior of packaged ground beef. Once exposed to air, it will turn bright red.
- Purchase meat last when shopping to ensure that ground beef (and other meats) stay as cold as possible. Choose packages that are cold and tightly wrapped without tears or punctures. Ground beef is more perishable than roasts or steaks. During grinding, any bacteria that are on the surface are mixed throughout, resulting in a shorter shelf life.

At-Home Storage

- Most labels have a “sell by” date. Ground beef should be purchased on or before that date. Store it in the coldest part of the refrigerator (36° to 40°F); use or freeze within 2 days.
- Ground beef can be frozen in its original transparent packaging for up to 2 weeks. To freeze ground beef up to 4 months, wrap in heavy-duty aluminum foil or place in a food-safe plastic freezer bag. Press out as much air as possible before freezing. Label with the date and weight.

Cooking & Food Safety

- Defrost frozen ground beef in the refrigerator (never at room temperature) to prevent bacterial growth. Allow about 24 hours to defrost a 1- to 1-1/2-inch thick package.
- Wash hands with hot soapy water before and after handling raw meat. Also, wash any surface or utensils that raw meat has touched.
- One pound of ground beef makes four (3-ounce) cooked servings.
- For best results when preparing patties, mix ingredients lightly but thoroughly; overmixing can cause a firm, compact texture instead of the desired moist, juicy results.
- For food safety reasons, it’s important to cook all ground beef thoroughly, including irradiated ground beef. Never eat raw or rare ground beef. Always cook burgers to 160°F. Insert an instant-read thermometer horizontally from the side into the center of the burger to accurately determine the internal temperature. The color of cooked ground beef is not a reliable indicator of doneness.
- Brush brown sauces such as teriyaki, Worcestershire or soy sauce on the cooked surface of the patties. When these types of sauces are mixed into the uncooked ground beef, it may be difficult to determine doneness.
- Turn ground beef patties with a spatula, without pressing down. Pressing causes loss of flavorful juices and results in dry burgers.

Funded by The Beef Checkoff

For more information, please contact:

National Cattlemen’s Beef Association • 9110 East Nichols Avenue • Centennial, CO 80112 • 303/694-0305

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