



An Extended Guide · No. 1819

Food and Cooking When the Power's Out

Eat well, stay safe, waste nothing

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! Read this first — never run anything that burns fuel indoors

Anything that burns fuel — a generator, a grill, a camp stove, a charcoal chimney, or a car engine — gives off carbon monoxide, an invisible, odorless gas that can kill in minutes. Never run any of them indoors, in a garage, in a shed, in a basement, or on a porch, not even with the door open and a fan going. A generator belongs outside only, well away from the house — the safety agencies say at least 20 feet — with the exhaust pointed away from every window, door, and vent. Put battery-backup carbon-monoxide alarms on every level and outside the bedrooms, and test them. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone into fresh air first and ask questions later. That rule matters most in this guide, because the temptation to drag a grill or camp stove inside to cook is exactly how people get hurt. Cook outdoors, always.

Let's plan food and cooking without power

Eating well during an outage isn't hard — it just takes a little planning so you're not staring into a warm fridge wondering what's still good.

I'm Bill, and this guide covers three things: stocking food you don't have to cook or chill, keeping your fridge and freezer cold as long as possible, and warming a meal safely when the stove is out. The safety part is simple but firm — nothing that burns fuel comes indoors.

We'll also walk through the food-safety timing the experts use, so you'll know exactly when food is still fine and when it's time to let it go. No guessing, no waste, no worry.

★ Questions about your setup?

Every kitchen and every appliance is a little different. If you'd like to think yours through together, call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Food and cooking, on one page

The essentials, if you remember nothing else.

- ☐ Stock a few days of food that needs no fridge or stove.
- ☐ Keep a manual can opener with the food.
- ☐ Keep the fridge and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- ☐ A full freezer holds cold far longer than a half-empty one.
- ☐ Throw out perishable food left above 40 degrees over 4 hours.
- ☐ When in doubt, throw it out — never taste to check.
- ☐ Warm food only with camp gear used outdoors, never inside.
- ☐ A cooler and ice can extend your fridge food a while.

✓ The golden rule of the fridge

Keep the doors shut. Every time you open the fridge or freezer, you let the cold escape and the clock speeds up.

Stocking food you don't have to cook

The best outage food needs no refrigerator and, ideally, no stove.

Build your stash from shelf-stable basics: canned soups, beans, vegetables, and fruit; peanut butter; crackers; nuts and dried fruit; granola or cereal bars; shelf-stable pouches and boxed meals; and a few comfort snacks. Pick things your household genuinely likes and can eat with little fuss.

Aim for a few days' worth to start, and lean toward foods that are fine straight from the can or package. Keep a manual can opener right with the food — an electric one is a paperweight in an outage.

✓ Shop your own pantry

Set aside cans and boxes you already buy, mark them as the outage stash, and simply replace them before they expire. That's a free food kit.

How long the fridge keeps food safe

Your refrigerator becomes a countdown the moment the power stops — here's the timing the experts use.

Kept closed, a refrigerator holds food safely for about four hours. After that, perishable items — meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, and leftovers — start to enter the danger zone. The key number to remember is 40 degrees: food held above it for more than a couple of hours is no longer safe.

A simple appliance thermometer in the fridge takes all the guessing out of it. If it reads above 40 degrees when power returns, you'll know exactly what has to go.

! Four hours, then be careful

Plan as though the fridge is good for about four hours with the door shut. Beyond that, start moving the most perishable items to a cooler with ice if you have it.

Your freezer holds out much longer

The freezer is your friend in an outage — it buys you far more time than the fridge.

A full freezer keeps food frozen for roughly 48 hours if you keep the door closed; a half-full one for about 24. All that frozen mass acts like a block of ice, holding the cold. The fuller it is, the longer it lasts.

Food that still has ice crystals or is at 40 degrees or below when power returns can generally be refrozen or cooked safely. Jugs of water frozen ahead of a storm help fill empty space and stretch that time even further.

✓ Fill the empty space

Before a storm, freeze jugs or bottles of water to pack out a half-empty freezer. They hold the cold longer and become drinking water later.

Coolers and ice: your backup fridge

A cooler and a bag of ice can carry your most important food through a longer outage.

When the fridge's four hours are running out, move the things you most want to save — a day's meals, medicines that need cool, a few perishables — into a cooler with ice. A well-packed cooler kept in the shade holds cold surprisingly well.

Keep an appliance thermometer in the cooler too, aiming to stay at or below 40 degrees. Block ice and frozen jugs last longer than cubes; dry ice works but needs careful, ventilated handling.

✓ Pre-chill the cooler

A cooler that's already cold holds temperature better. If a storm's coming, chill it ahead with a little ice before you need to load it.

Warming a meal without power

There are safe ways to heat food in an outage — and one unbreakable rule about where.

A camp stove, a grill, or a charcoal chimney can cook a fine meal, but every one of them must be used outdoors only. They give off carbon monoxide, and bringing them into the house, garage, or even a porch is how tragedies happen. Set up outside, well away from doors and windows.

Plenty of good outage meals need no cooking at all — and that's often the easiest path. When you do want something warm, do it outside, then bring the finished food in to eat.

! Never bring outdoor cooking indoors

No grill, camp stove, charcoal, or camp heater inside the house or garage — not even with a window open. Carbon monoxide is invisible, odorless, and deadly. Cook outside, always.

Easy meals that need no cooking at all

Honestly, the simplest outage food is the kind you never heat.

- Peanut butter or tuna on crackers or bread.
- Canned beans, chili, or soup eaten at room temperature.
- Cheese, cured meats, nuts, and dried fruit.
- Cereal or granola with shelf-stable milk.
- Canned fruit, applesauce, and shelf-stable pudding.
- Sandwiches from anything you're using up out of the fridge.

✓ Eat the fridge first

In the first hours of an outage, make meals from the fridge before its food turns — that's food you'd otherwise lose, and it saves your shelf-stable stash for later.

When power returns: keep it or toss it

The moment the lights come back, a few clear rules tell you what's safe.

Check your thermometers first. In the fridge, throw out perishable food — meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, milk, soft cheese, cut fruit, and leftovers — that sat above 40 degrees for more than a couple of hours. In the freezer, food with ice crystals or at 40 degrees or below is generally safe to refreeze or cook.

Some things hold up fine at room temperature for a while: hard cheeses, butter, many condiments, whole fruits and vegetables, bread, and anything unopened and shelf-stable. When you're unsure about a perishable item, let it go.

! When in doubt, throw it out — and never taste

You cannot tell by smell or taste whether food has turned dangerous. If a perishable item was too warm too long, discard it without sampling it. Food is replaceable; a bad illness during an outage is misery.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

The food-safety rules are identical everywhere. What differs is how long you're planning to feed everyone, and how easily you can restock.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, outages are usually shorter and a store is close by, so a modest few days of food and a cooler often see you through comfortably.

- A few days of no-cook food covers a typical outage.
- You can usually restock quickly once stores reopen.
- A grill or camp stove on the patio handles warm meals — outdoors.
- Neighbors are close for sharing freezer space or ice.

If you are out in the country on a well

In the country, plan to feed the household longer. Stores are farther, outages run longer, and a big chest freezer may hold a lot worth saving.

- Keep a deeper pantry — a store run is a real trip.
- A generator can protect a full freezer of food; see our generator and food-safety guides.
- Stock more water for cooking, since the well pump is down too.
- Plan several days of meals that need no power at all.

★ Let's plan meals that fit your home

Whether it's a couple of quiet days in town or a longer stretch out in the country, I'll help you stock sensibly. Call (330) 200-8042.

Protecting a freezer full of food

If you keep a chest freezer stocked, it's worth a little extra thought.

A full freezer is both a blessing and something to protect — it holds cold for a couple of days closed, but a long outage can threaten a lot of food at once. Keeping it full, keeping it closed, and having a thermometer inside are your first defenses.

For a home with a big freezer investment, a generator can be worth it precisely to protect that food. Our generator guides and our food-safety approach here work hand in hand — you can even cycle a generator between the fridge and freezer since each holds cold a while.

✓ A freezer thermometer settles every question

When power returns after a long outage, one glance at a freezer thermometer — and whether food still has ice crystals — tells you what is safe to keep.

Babies, special diets, and medicines that chill

Some households have food needs that deserve their own small plan.

If there's a baby, keep a supply of formula and any needed clean water. For special diets — low-salt, diabetic, allergy-safe — stock shelf-stable options that fit, so an outage doesn't force a bad choice. And if anyone keeps medicine that must stay cool, plan a cooler spot for it from the start.

Our medical-device guide and first-aid guide go further on health needs. For food, the theme is the same: think ahead about the specific people in your home.

★ Special needs are worth a conversation

If someone in your home has particular food or medicine needs, I'm glad to help you plan around them. Call (330) 200-8042.

The food-safety timeline at a glance

Here's the whole timing picture in one simple table.

Where	How long it holds
Fridge, door closed	About 4 hours
Full freezer, closed	About 48 hours
Half-full freezer, closed	About 24 hours
Cooler with ice	As long as it stays at or below 40F

The magic number through all of it is 40 degrees. Above that for more than a couple of hours, and perishable food is no longer safe. An inexpensive appliance thermometer in each spot turns this from a guess into a simple reading.

✓ **Two cheap thermometers earn their keep**

One in the fridge and one in the freezer cost very little and take away all the guesswork about what's safe when the power returns.

Getting your kitchen ready before a storm

A little prep when a storm's in the forecast pays off for days.

- ❑ Turn the fridge and freezer to their coldest settings.
- ❑ Freeze jugs of water to fill freezer space and chill coolers.
- ❑ Group meals in the fridge so you open the door less.
- ❑ Make sure you have a manual can opener and a full stash.
- ❑ Set out a cooler and know where you'll get ice.
- ❑ Plan a couple of no-cook meals you can make in the dark.

✓ Cold to start is cold that lasts

The colder your fridge and freezer are when the power quits, the longer they'll hold safe temperatures. Turning them down ahead of a storm is a free head start.

A word on camp stoves and grills

If warm meals matter to you, a bit of outdoor cooking gear is worth having — used correctly.

A propane camp stove, a gas or charcoal grill, or a similar setup lets you cook real meals in an outage. Keep the fuel for it stored safely outside the house, per our fuel-storage guidance in the generator series, and always cook out in the open air.

Practice with your gear once before you need it, so you're not learning to light a camp stove by flashlight during a storm. Keep it simple: a way to boil water and heat a can covers most needs.

! Outdoors means truly outdoors

A garage with the door open, a covered porch, or under an awning are all still 'indoors' for carbon monoxide. Cook out in the open, away from doors and windows, every time.

Making your food last through a long outage

A few habits stretch a modest stash a long way.

- Eat perishable fridge food first, then frozen, then shelf-stable.
- Open the fridge and freezer as seldom as you can.
- Plan meals a day ahead so you open doors once, not ten times.
- Keep portions sensible — you're pacing, not feasting.
- Use a cooler for the day's food so the fridge stays shut.

✓ A day's food in the cooler

Each morning, move that day's meals into the cooler. Then the fridge and freezer can stay closed and cold for whatever comes next.

Don't forget comfort food and morale

An outage is easier to weather with a few familiar comforts on hand.

Pack a few treats and favorites into your stash — cookies, chocolate, a favorite snack, instant coffee or tea if you can heat water outside. Small comforts do a lot to keep spirits up, especially for children and for anyone feeling anxious in the dark.

✓ A warm drink lifts the whole mood

If you can safely boil water outdoors, a hot cup of coffee, tea, or cocoa can make a cold, dark evening feel a great deal more manageable.

A good food plan for very little

Outage food doesn't mean a special shopping spree.

Most of a solid food stash is ordinary groceries you already buy, simply set aside and rotated. A manual can opener, a couple of thermometers, and a cooler you may already own round it out. There's no need for pricey freeze-dried kits unless you want them.

✓ Build it from your grocery list

Each shopping trip, grab one or two extra shelf-stable items for the stash. In a few weeks you'll have days of food without a single special trip.

A simple few-day outage menu

It helps to picture actual meals, not just a shelf of cans.

Meal	Easy no-power idea
Breakfast	Cereal or oatmeal bars, fruit, peanut butter toast
Lunch	Crackers, tuna or cheese, canned fruit
Dinner	Canned chili or stew, warmed outside if you like
Snacks	Nuts, dried fruit, granola bars, a treat

✓ **Plan it once, relax later**

Sketch two or three days of meals like this now, and note what you'd need. Then the stash isn't a random pile — it's actual dinners.

Your printable food-and-cooking checklist

The whole plan, ready to tape inside a cupboard door.

- ☐ A few days of no-cook, shelf-stable food you actually like.
- ☐ A manual can opener stored with the food.
- ☐ Appliance thermometers in the fridge and freezer.
- ☐ Frozen water jugs to fill freezer space and chill a cooler.
- ☐ A cooler and a plan for where to get ice.
- ☐ Fridge good ~4 hours; full freezer ~48 hours — doors closed.
- ☐ Throw out perishables above 40F over 4 hours; when in doubt, toss it.
- ☐ Any outdoor cooking gear — used outdoors only, never inside.

★ Want help stocking a sensible stash?

I'll help you build a food plan that fits your household and your outages, thermometers and all. A first visit is a flat \$99. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The food-and-cooking questions I hear most.

Q: How long will food in my fridge stay safe?

About four hours with the door kept closed. After that, perishables held above 40 degrees for more than a couple of hours should be thrown out. An appliance thermometer makes the call easy.

Q: How long does a freezer keep food frozen?

Roughly 48 hours for a full freezer, or about 24 for a half-full one, if you keep the door closed. Food still holding ice crystals or at 40 degrees or below can usually be refrozen or cooked.

Q: Can I use a grill or camp stove indoors if I crack a window?

No — never. Grills, camp stoves, and charcoal give off carbon monoxide and must be used outdoors only, away from doors and windows. An open window does not make an enclosed space safe.

Q: How do I know if food is still good?

Go by temperature and time, not smell or taste. If a perishable item sat above 40 degrees too long, discard it without tasting. When in doubt, throw it out.

Q: What food should I stock for an outage?

Shelf-stable things you don't have to cook or chill: canned soups and beans, peanut butter, crackers, nuts, dried fruit, and pouched meals — plus a manual can opener and a few comfort snacks.

★ Ask me anything about your kitchen

Fridge, freezer, or a full chest freezer worth protecting — call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you make a plan that fits your home.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made food and cooking during an outage feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Your Outage Food Plan

Four steps to eating well with no power



Warm meals are made outside, then brought in to eat.

How Long Food Stays Cold

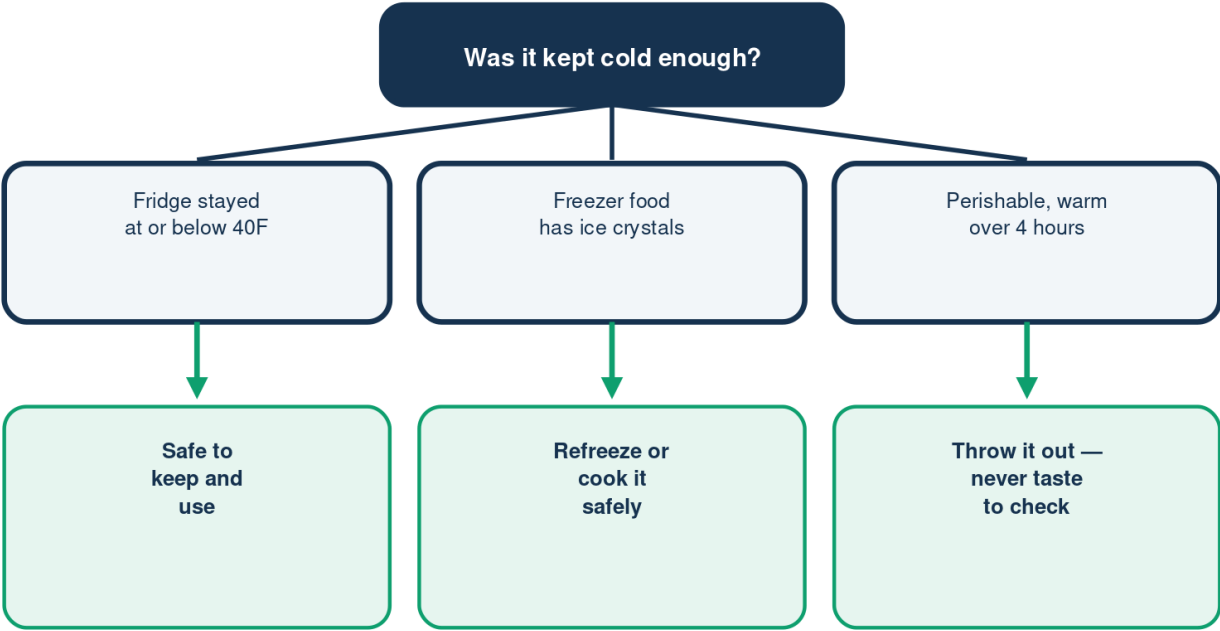
Keep the doors closed and the clock slows

	How long it holds
Fridge, closed	About 4 hours
Full freezer	About 48 hours
Half freezer	About 24 hours
Cooler with ice	While under 40F

The magic line is 40F — above it too long, and it must go.

Keep It or Toss It?

When the power comes back, check before you eat



When in doubt, throw it out. Food is cheaper than illness.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Where It's Safe to Cook

Anything that burns fuel goes outside

	Safe	Never
Grill	Outdoors, open air	Indoors or garage
Camp stove	Outside, away from doors	On a porch
No-cook meals	Anywhere, indoors fine	n/a

An open window or open garage door is still indoors for CO.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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