

## Resources

<sup>1</sup><http://www.culinary.net/articles/features/safeside/foodgifts.html>.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Mail\\_Order\\_Food\\_Safety/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Mail_Order_Food_Safety/index.asp).

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/news\\_&\\_events/NR\\_120607\\_01/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/news_&_events/NR_120607_01/index.asp).

Information concerning the mail order food industry involves mainly safety standards, marketing, and consumer rights, and can be found on the following websites:

The U.S Department of Agriculture at [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

NSF International at [www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org)

The Direct Marketing Association at [www.dma.org](http://www.dma.org)

You can also check your state's Office of Consumer Affairs or the Federal Trade Commission ([www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)) for your consumer rights.



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*Center for  
Hygiene & Health  
in the Home and Community*

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## Introduction

Crates of fresh fruit, chocolate-covered nuts, tangy aged cheese – all make for very appealing holiday gifts. Besides homemade culinary treats, mail order food sales in the U.S. account for about \$6 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> However, if you want your tasty treats to arrive safely, there are a few tips to follow.

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## Pears or Peanuts: Pointers For Mailing Food Safely



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## Ordering Mail Order Food

While the mail order industry has a good safety record,<sup>2</sup> you do want to find a reputable vendor to assure the quality and safe delivery of the food you order. Though there is no official list of reliable vendors, you can:



- Rely on previous experience with a vendor, whether you sent or received food gifts.
- Comparison shop: read the vendors' websites for information like – how is the food packaged? Is there overnight shipping? What is the return policy?
- Check the Better Business Bureau website for a vendor's history ([www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)), or the Direct Marketing Association vendors' list (DMA, [www.dma.org](http://www.dma.org)).
- Beware of ordering food gifts from abroad. Consumer protection laws may not apply to companies outside the U.S.
- Consumer Reports® has an excellent Q&A report of consumer rights protected by law at [www.consumerreports.org/cro/shopping/december-2009/the-savvy-shopper/know-your-consumer-rights/the-savvy-shopper-consumer-rights.htm](http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/shopping/december-2009/the-savvy-shopper/know-your-consumer-rights/the-savvy-shopper-consumer-rights.htm).

## Foods That Travel Well

Perishable foods such as meat, fish, or cheesecake need to stay frozen or refrigerated, must be shipped overnight, and unwrapped promptly.

Nonperishables are less likely to spoil:<sup>3</sup>

- Dried food: jerky, dried fruits, canned nuts
- Canned food: meats, fish, dips, cracker spreads
- Condiments in unbreakable jars or packets
- Dense or dry baked goods, including commercially packaged cookies and cakes



- Hard candies and homemade sweets

## Shipping Options

- Most foods, including all perishables, should be shipped overnight
- The outer package of perishables should be labeled 'Keep Refrigerated'
- Alert the recipient of the delivery date and mail the package where the recipient can promptly refrigerate any perishables
- Order early in the week to ensure prompt delivery



## Receiving Mail Order Food

Perishable food kept between 40 and 140°F is one of the top causes of food borne illness.<sup>3</sup>

- Open perishable food packages immediately and check the temperature
- Perishables should arrive **at or below 40°F**
- Frozen food should be frozen or partially frozen with visible ice crystals<sup>2</sup>
- All perishables should be promptly refrigerated or frozen. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) keeps a chart listing how long every type of mail order food can be safely stored, frozen, or refrigerated at [www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Mail\\_Order\\_Food\\_Safety\\_Table/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Mail_Order_Food_Safety_Table/index.asp).
- If the package states 'Contains Dry Ice,' wear gloves when unpacking it. Keep the dry ice out of reach of children and pets, and follow directions for safe disposal

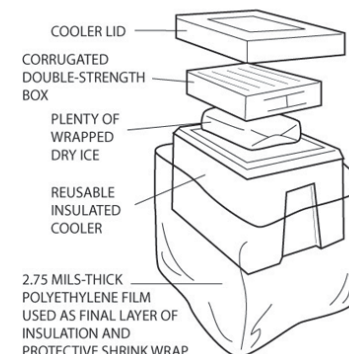
## Proper Packaging

Vendors should list their packaging methods for food items, and you should package homemade edibles properly for mailing.<sup>2</sup>

- Pack in a heavy cardboard or insulated container (Styrofoam or cooler)
- For perishables, pack with a cold source, i.e. frozen gel packs or dry ice

- Do not touch dry ice with bare hands or let it come into direct contact with food
- Wrap the box in 2 layers of brown paper and label 'Keep Refrigerated' and/or 'Contains Dry Ice' as necessary
- Use recommended packing tape and write the recipient's name and address clearly
- For proper food packaging guidelines, visit the USDA's website listed as Resource (2).

"MINIATURE DEEP-FREEZE" PACKAGING



## Mail Order Mishaps

What should you do if a mail order food package arrives damaged or spoiled?

- Never taste any suspect food. Any perishable food that arrives above 40°F could harbor dangerous bacteria and is unsafe for consumption
- Notify the vendor immediately
- If you are unable to resolve the issue directly with the company, you can:
- Contact the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline for all meat, poultry, and egg products at 1-888-674-6854
- Call the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Outreach and Information Center for all other food items at 1-888-723-3366
- Contact the DMA in writing or by email ([Consumer@the-DMA.org](mailto:Consumer@the-DMA.org)). DMA will act as an intermediary between you and the vendor and will resolve most complaints within 30 days.