Remove Date Format in Excel (With Example)

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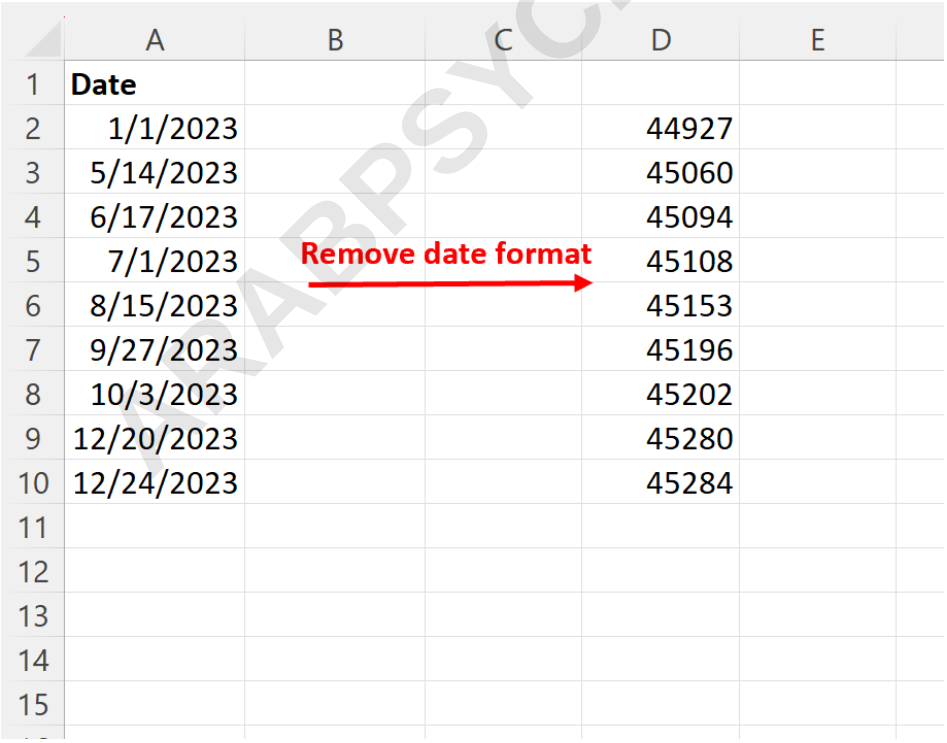
Understanding Date Formatting in Excel

When working with large datasets in Excel, you often encounter situations where date values are displayed in a specific, user-friendly Date Format. While these formats are helpful for readability, they are essentially numerical values underneath a cosmetic layer. This formatting defines how the underlying number--the date's serial value--is presented to the user. For instance, a date might appear as "MM/DD/YYYY" or "DD-Mon-YY", but Excel stores it internally as a whole number representing the count of days since January 1, 1900.

The need to remove a date format arises frequently in data cleaning, preparation for advanced statistical analysis, or when troubleshooting unexpected calculation errors. Removing the format reverts the display back to this underlying numerical representation, allowing for precise manipulation of the raw data. This conversion is essential for understanding the actual time difference between dates, as it exposes the exact number of days stored by the spreadsheet software.

Consider a column of data where dates are clearly visible, but you need to manipulate or view the raw, numerical input. The following image illustrates a typical column of dates that are currently subject to a standard date format. Our goal is to strip this formatting away to reveal the numerical data points.



Why Removing Date Formats is Necessary

The primary reason for removing a date format is to access the Serial Number System that Excel employs for date calculation. By converting the visible date (e.g., 01/01/2023) into its numerical equivalent (e.g., 44927), users can confirm that the data is being treated correctly as a number, not text, which is vital for mathematical operations. Without removing the format, you might mistake a cell for containing text or an incorrectly formatted number, leading to inaccurate summaries or formulas.

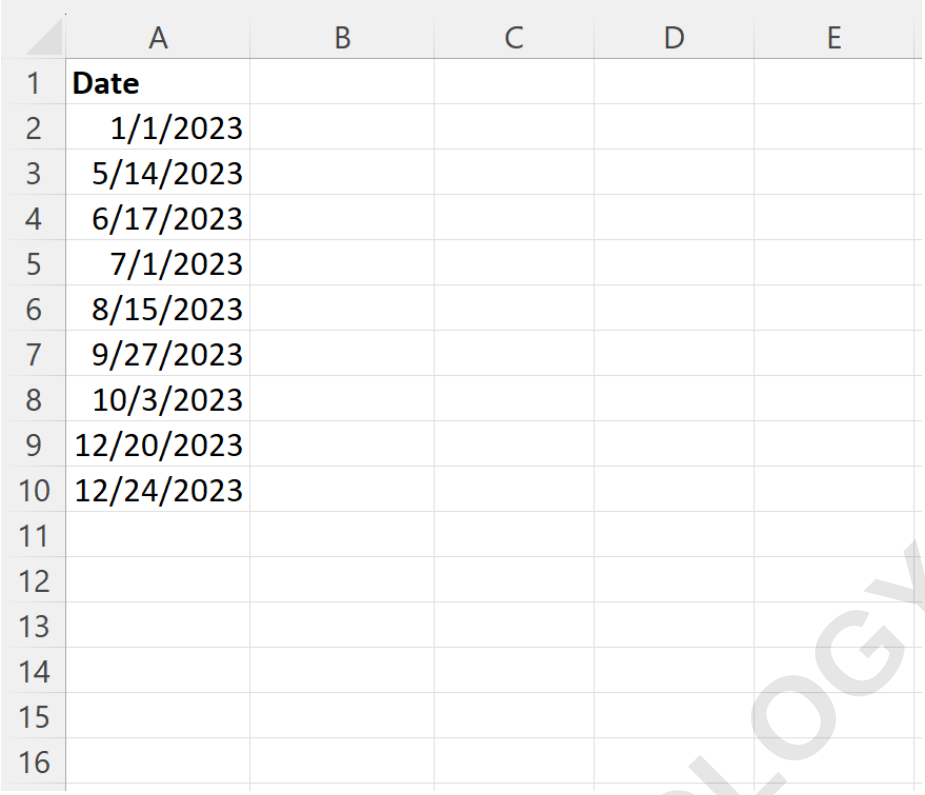
This process is especially critical when migrating data between different systems or software environments, as date formats can vary significantly globally (e.g., US MM/DD/YYYY vs. European DD/MM/YYYY). Reverting the data to its neutral serial number ensures consistency and prevents potential misinterpretation of dates when imported into databases or other analytical platforms. Furthermore, understanding this serial representation is foundational for advanced functions, such as customizing date formats or performing complex time-series analysis within Excel.

Fortunately, Excel provides two highly effective and straightforward methods for achieving this format removal. Both methods are accessible directly from the **Home** tab of the ribbon interface and yield the exact same result: exposing the underlying date serial number.

Method 1: Use the Clear Formats Feature: This tool is designed to quickly strip away any visual formatting applied to cells, including number, font, border, and background styles.

Method 2: Use the General Format Feature: This method specifically changes the cell's number format back to the default setting, which in the absence of other formatting, defaults to the numerical serial value.

We will demonstrate both techniques using the following sample data set, which consists of various dates in column A:



	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Date**				
2	1/1/2023				
3	5/14/2023				
4	6/17/2023				
5	7/1/2023				
6	8/15/2023				
7	9/27/2023				
8	10/3/2023				
9	12/20/2023				
10	12/24/2023				
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

Method 1: Utilizing the Clear Formats Feature

The **Clear Formats** feature is a powerful utility within the Clear Formats menu that allows users to quickly reset cell appearance without affecting the cell's content or underlying value. When applied to dates, it specifically targets and eliminates the custom date formatting rule, reverting the cell display to its raw data state, which is the Serial Number System value. This is particularly useful when you have applied extensive formatting (e.g., specific fonts, colors, borders) along with the date format, and you wish to remove all of them simultaneously.

This method is often preferred for its efficiency in batch operations. If you have hundreds or thousands of cells that need formatting cleanup, the **Clear Formats** option saves time by grouping the removal of all formatting attributes into a single action. It is located conveniently within the **Editing** group on the primary **Home** ribbon, making it easily accessible for frequent use during data preparation stages.

Understanding the distinction between clearing formats and clearing content is essential. Clearing formats only affects how the data looks; the date itself (the serial number) remains intact. Clearing content, however, would delete the actual data from the cells. The ability to isolate the removal of formatting ensures data integrity while achieving the desired visual change.

Step-by-Step Guide: Using Clear Formats

To effectively remove the date format using the dedicated **Clear Formats** tool, follow these detailed steps. We will use the sample data range **A2:A10** for this demonstration, ensuring all cells with formatted dates are selected before proceeding.

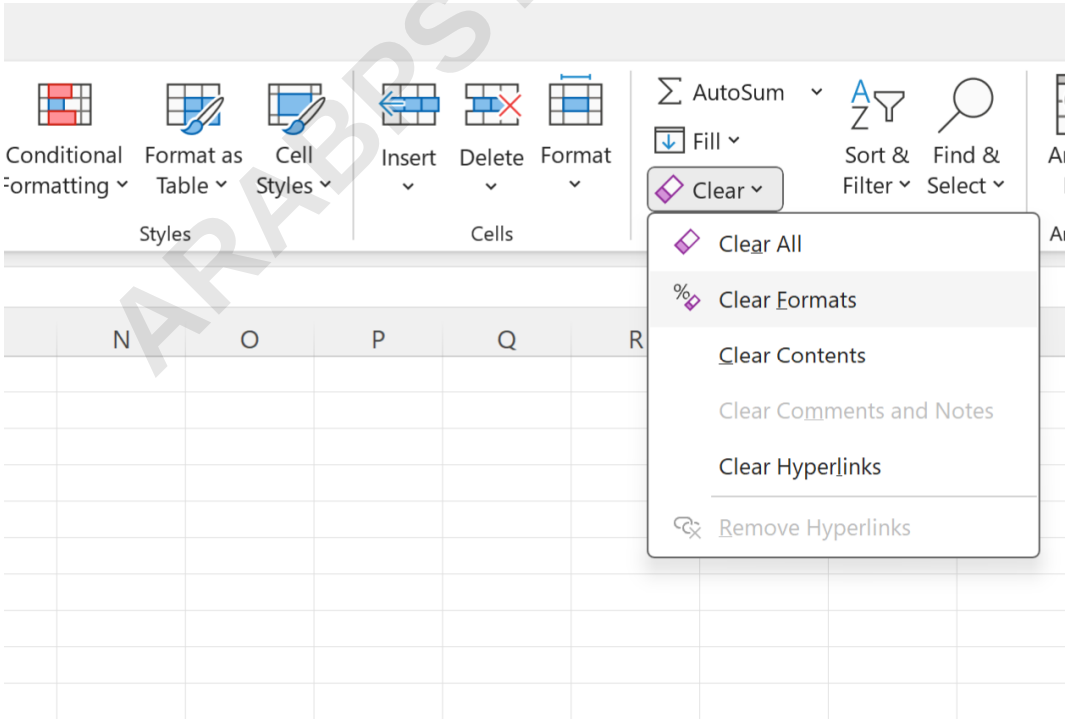
Select the Target Range: Begin by highlighting the entire range of cells containing the dates you wish to reformat. In our example, this is the range **A2:A10**. Accurate selection is critical, as the action will only apply to the highlighted cells.

Navigate to the Home Tab: Ensure you are viewing the **Home** tab on the main ribbon interface. All formatting and editing tools are typically centralized here for quick access.

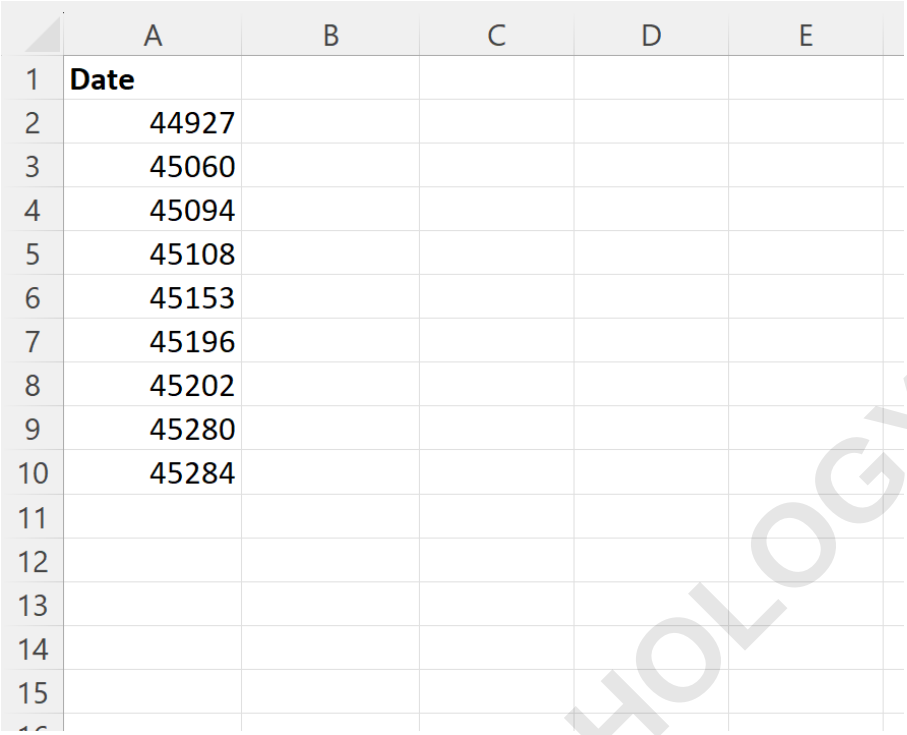
Locate the Clear Icon: On the far right side of the **Home** tab, find the **Editing** group. Within this group, click on the **Clear** icon, which is usually represented by an eraser or a similar symbol. This action will open a drop-down menu with several options for clearing different attributes.

Select Clear Formats: From the expanded drop-down menu, choose the option labeled **Clear Formats**. This command instructs Excel to strip away all visual formatting attributes from the selected cells, including the specific date format applied.

The selection process is visualized in the image below, highlighting where the **Clear Formats** option resides within the ribbon structure:



Upon executing this command, the cosmetic date format is instantly removed, and the cells now display their underlying numerical values. This numerical data represents the date's position in Excel's proprietary serial number sequence.



	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Date**				
2	44927				
3	45060				
4	45094				
5	45108				
6	45153				
7	45196				
8	45202				
9	45280				
10	45284				
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Method 2: Applying the General Format Setting

An alternative, and often faster, approach to removing a specific date format is by changing the cell's number category back to **General Format**. The General Format is the default setting for any cell in Excel and is designed to display data as precisely as possible without applying any specific numerical or textual rules. When a date-formatted cell is converted to General Format, the program reverts to displaying the raw numerical content it stores, which, for dates, is the serial number.

This method is highly focused; unlike **Clear Formats**, it only affects the number formatting category and leaves other visual attributes (like font color or borders) untouched. This precision can be beneficial if you only need to adjust the way numbers are interpreted while preserving the cell's aesthetic styling. For users accustomed to managing data types through the Number group, this method feels intuitive and integrated into their typical workflow.

The **Number Format** dropdown is the central control panel for managing how numerical data is displayed, offering everything from currency and percentages to custom date and time formats. By selecting **General** from this list, you are instructing Excel to treat the date value simply as a raw integer, thereby revealing the serial number used for calculation.

Step-by-Step Guide: Using General Format

Utilizing the **General Format** feature involves navigating to the Number group on the Home tab and selecting the appropriate setting from the format dropdown menu. This is a highly efficient way to manage data types across selected ranges.

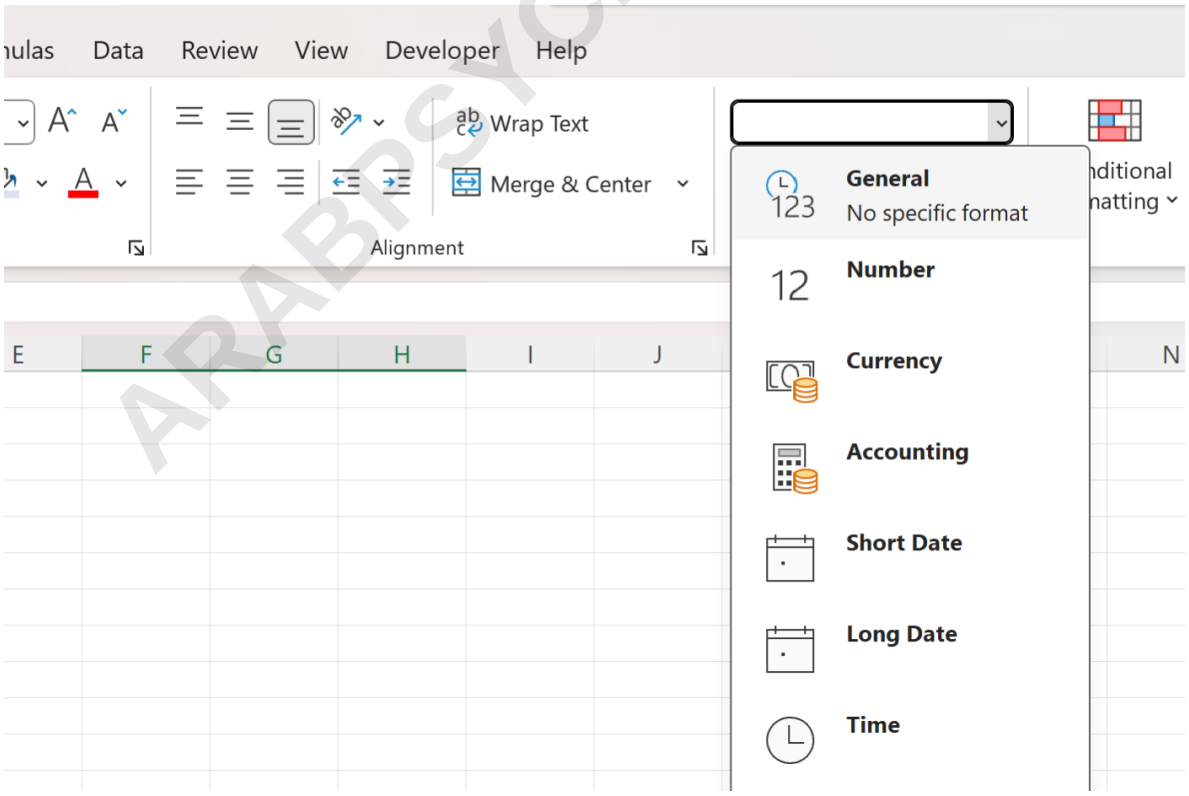
Highlight the Data: Select the cell range **A2:A10**, encompassing all the dates you intend to modify.

Access the Number Group: On the **Home** tab of the ribbon, locate the **Number** group, typically positioned near the middle of the ribbon.

Open the Number Format Dropdown: Click on the dropdown menu within the **Number** group. This menu usually defaults to the currently applied format (e.g., "Date" or "Custom").

Select General: From the list of available formats (which includes options like Currency, Percentage, and Short Date), click **General Format**. This action immediately overrides the existing date format.

The visual guide below shows the precise location of the **General** option within the Number Format menu:



Just like with the **Clear Formats** method, the result is the removal of the visual date representation, leaving the underlying serial number visible. This confirms that both methods are equally effective at achieving the core goal of exposing the raw, numerical date data.

	A	B	C	D	E
1	**Date**				
2	44927				
3	45060				
4	45094				
5	45108				
6	45153				
7	45196				
8	45202				
9	45280				
10	45284				
11					
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The Importance of Excel's Serial Date System

When you remove the date format using either the **Clear Formats** or **General Format** feature, the resulting integers are not arbitrary. They are part of Excel's fundamental Serial Number System, where dates are stored as sequential numbers. This system designates day zero as January 1, 1900. Therefore, any number you see represents the total count of full days elapsed since that baseline date.

This numerical representation is what makes date calculations possible. When you subtract one date from another in Excel, the program is actually subtracting the corresponding serial numbers, immediately providing the exact number of days between the two points in time. Understanding that 44927 is merely a specific count of days (since 1/1/1900) allows analysts to perform complex time-based calculations, such as determining the lifespan of a project or the average time between transactions, with guaranteed accuracy.

To illustrate this concept, consider how specific dates are translated into their numerical serial equivalents under this system:

The date 1/1/2023 is displayed as **44,927**. This means 44,927 days have passed since January 1,

1900.

The date 5/14/2023 is displayed as **45,060**. This indicates a later point in time by 133 days (45,060 - 44,927).

The date 6/17/2023 is displayed as **45,094**. This is 34 days after 5/14/2023.

These numerical values confirm that the operations successfully removed the visual formatting layer while preserving the underlying, calculation-ready data, achieving the desired outcome of the exercise.