



## REDUCE FOOD WASTE

# Feed People, Not Landfills

**Katie Pickford, MS**  
**Dawn Brewer, PhD, RD, LD**  
**Heather Norman-Burgdolf, PhD**

For most people, the largest trash can in the home is in the kitchen. The most common things they throw away are food and food packaging. One way to support sustainable eating and the health of the environment is to reduce food waste. Making efforts to reduce food waste is an important piece in the sustainable diet puzzle.

## What is food waste?

Food waste is any part of food, which can or can't be eaten, which is produced but not used or consumed. For example, a banana has the fruit inside that you can eat and the peel is the part of the food you can't eat. Expired foods, foods that have gone stale, and foods that have spoiled or rotted are the most common types of food waste in homes. Leftovers from a prepared meal that aren't eaten within the recommended time are another common example of food waste.

## How much food do we waste?

The United Nations estimates one-third of all food produced in the world is never eaten. So, imagine for every three apples grown, one perfect, uneaten



apple is thrown into the trash. Retail and consumer waste are the primary source of food waste in the U.S. It is estimated that households waste 76 billion pounds of food per year. Compared to an estimated 22 billion to 33 billion pounds of food waste from restaurants and an additional 7 billion to 11 billion pounds of food waste from institutions like schools, hotels, and hospitals. When we throw away food, it is also a waste of resources, like land, water, and energy. Food waste pollutes land, water, and air, and affects human health. Making small changes as a consumer can help reduce food waste and save money at the same time.

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## Steps to reduce food waste

There are several steps you can take at home to reduce food waste. You may be doing some of them already.

### Transform leftovers

Transforming leftovers into nutritious meals can help you save money and reduce food waste. For example, turn old rice and roasted vegetables into a stir-fry. Or you could use leftover roasted vegetables to top a homemade pizza. It simply takes a bit of creativity and willingness to be adventurous with foods you serve in your home. If you realize you prepare too much food when you make meals, simply cut back on the amount you prepare if you often waste the leftovers.

### Stick to the list

Be mindful with your grocery shopping and make a grocery list before you head to the store. Having an organized grocery list can save you time while navigating the store and help you stay focused on your task. Check your kitchen to make sure you don't already have an item on your grocery list before you head out. It can also help you steer clear of impulse buys while shopping and you're more likely to stick to your budget.

### Shop smart

Items such as meat, dairy, and eggs are kept at cooler temperatures to prevent spoilage. Consider shopping for these perishable foods last. This is important during the warmer months when food traveling from the grocery to your home could spoil faster.



If possible, pack a small cooler for the ride home from the grocery store to keep foods cool, especially if you must travel a county or two away to get to your preferred grocery store or supermarket.

### Buy imperfect produce

Consumers can help reduce food waste at their local food store by buying good but imperfect items. You may be drawn to the picture-perfect produce item at the store. Typically, the imperfect-looking item will be tossed or go to waste because shoppers choose not to buy it. Consider buying items that are oddly shaped or slightly blemished because they are often reduced in price, have the same nutritional quality, and taste as good as the perfect ones. Certain companies are even working to reduce food waste at grocery stores by shipping imperfect produce directly to homes at a discounted price. However, do not buy produce that smells or looks rotten.

## Make soups and smoothies

Do you find yourself tossing out leftover broccoli stems, wilted greens, and other overripe produce? A quick nutritious way to eat these foods, instead of throwing them away, is in homemade soups and smoothies. You can freeze vegetable scraps until you have enough to make vegetable stock for soups. You can even use certain parts of vegetables that we may not normally eat like carrot tops and broccoli stalks to bulk up a stew. Freeze fruits such as bananas (make sure you peel them first!) and berries before they overripen for fruit smoothies. You may even want to try some vegetables like zucchini or kale in your smoothie.

## Consider using meal kit delivery services

Mail order meal kits give people an opportunity to cook their own meals at home. The meal kits come with all the necessary ingredients for a recipe, the exact amounts of ingredients, and specific portions which may reduce food waste in your home. It is not well understood if meal kits are budget friendly or environmentally sustainable. Below is a table that weighs the pros and cons of meal kits that you can use to decide if it is a good fit for you and your lifestyle.



## Are meal kits a sustainable option for you?

| Pro or Con?     |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Cost            | <b>Pro and Con:</b> Meal kit costs are affordable when they are broken down to the number of meals a single kit makes (depending upon the company). However, a significant percentage of the cost for the meal kit is the cost for transportation, even though the company may tell you it is providing “free shipping.” |
| Food waste      | <b>Pro:</b> The preportioned ingredients in meal kits decrease food waste. The meal is designed to feed a specific number of people and no ingredients are wasted or half-used. Decreasing food waste significantly increases the environmental sustainability of meal kits compared to other meals made at home.        |
| Packaging       | <b>Con:</b> Each food item is individually wrapped in a meal kit to ensure food safety. This can create a lot of plastic waste if the recipe requires many ingredients. The ability to recycle or reuse packaging will vary from company to company.   |
| Cooking at home | <b>Pro:</b> A meal kit promotes cooking at home. Preparing food at home enables someone to carefully adjust recipes for dietary preferences or to simply reduce the amount of salt and fat added to dishes to make them align better with Dietary Guideline Recommendations.   |



# Store fresh produce correctly

Storing fresh fruits and vegetables in the right place can slow down the rate of spoiling. The table below highlights the best places in the kitchen to store common fruits and vegetables so they will last longer.

| Storage Type for Produce     | Examples   |
|------------------------------|--|
| Cool, dry place              | Eggplants, potatoes, bananas, avocados, oranges, winter squashes   |
| Refrigerator                 | Most fruits and vegetables like apples, asparagus, carrots, grapes, blueberries, strawberries, lettuce             |
| Room temperature/ countertop | Garlic, onion (away from other produce items), tomatoes (out of sunlight), uncut melons (cantaloupe or watermelon) |

## Use your refrigerator wisely

Some spaces in refrigerators are cooler than others. It is important to know how to best store food and beverages in a refrigerator to avoid food waste. Certain food items, like dairy items, may last longer if you store them in the coolest part of the refrigerator, like the top shelf.

## Use your freezer

You can portion most food items and freeze them to keep for quick meals and snacks months after you first prepare them. Freezing foods also provides ways to save fresh, perishable foods for later use and reduce the amount of food that may end up in the trash. For example, you can cool large batches of soups or stews

and then freeze them in freezer-safe containers for easy meals within the next couple of months.

## Can and store

At-home canning is a method used to keep food safe to eat over longer periods of time without refrigeration. This was once a necessary practice to ensure food was available year-round. At-home canning is less energy intensive than long-term refrigeration and is especially helpful when managing a surplus of produce from the garden during the summer. You need special equipment and training to safely can food at home.

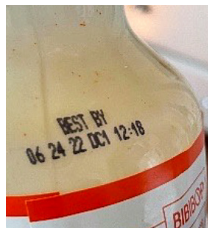


## Understand date labels on packaged food

Too many consumers toss out food from their pantry when it reaches the “Best Before” date. Dates listed on food packages can be confusing and are often used to communicate to the manufacturer, not the consumer, about the quality of the item. The bottom line is, date labels are meant to reflect quality, not food safety. Understanding date labels can go a long way in reducing food waste and saving money.

If the date on a product passes, and you have not consumed it, the product should still be safe, except for infant formula. If the food item has been stored incorrectly or it is clear the item is spoiled, it is not safe to consume. Spoiled foods will have an off smell, flavor, or texture and you should not eat them. Other visible signs the food has spoiled is the presence of mold, a slimy film, or discoloration. Table 3 explains the meaning of common date labels on food packages.

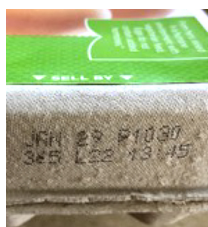
- **“Best-By”:** Refers to food quality and flavor. You can consume food after this date, and it should still be safe. *See the label on the condiment on the right as an example.*



- **“Use-By or Best-If-Used-By”:** Gives the last date recommended to use the product while at peak quality. This is not a safety date except when used with infant formula. *See the label on the can on the right as an example.*



- **“Sell By or Expires On”:** Used by the food retailer and does not indicate food safety. Rather, it indicates when a product is at “peak quality.” If food shows no signs of spoilage, you may still consume it. *See the label on the egg carton on the right as an example.*



## Consider composting

Foods thrown away end up in landfills and decompose among all the other trash. Consider composting your food waste instead of sending it to the landfills where it will take up more space. Composting food scraps at home or in your community creates the opportunity to transform waste into healthy soil to use on your own yard, garden, or plants.

## Food for thought

Humans must make and eat food to live. Yet, we waste large amounts of food. This also means much of the resources and energy that went into producing the food are wasted, too. This hurts the environment. The good news is you can make small changes over time that can make a big difference in reducing food waste and may actually save you money in the long run. So, as a consumer, any action you can take to minimize the waste you produce at home is important! Try one of the tips below to reduce food waste.

1. **Transform leftovers** into a delicious new meal. Combine leftovers with one or two new ingredients in your kitchen to make a new meal or snack. For example, add leftover roasted veggies to a soup or add leftover grilled chicken on top of a salad.
2. You can help reduce food waste by **planning shopping trips**. Before your next shopping trip, take your grocery list and double-check you do not already own any items on the list. This ensures you are only buying what you need, saves money, and may reduce food waste.
3. **Composting food scraps** may be a possibility if you have a backyard or even if you don't. For those with a backyard, create a compost pile to transform old food scraps into rich soil for your garden or yard. For those with limited space, smaller compost bins are available to buy.

## References

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