

Fighting Food Waste We Can Make a Difference!

The USDA, EPA, and FDA recognizes April as “Reducing Food Waste Month. Here are some ways we all can make a difference.

It happens easily – we take more food at the buffet than we can eat, or the last potato in the bag “goes bad” before it gets used. Maybe that large jar of pasta sauce is more than you can use at one meal, but the leftover portion just gets old in the refrigerator.

Food waste occurs when an edible food goes uneaten – and food waste happens in many ways. Maybe a store owner can’t sell a funny-shaped or “ugly” carrot, or maybe portions served in a cafeteria were so large there was lots of food left on plates after customers finished. By some estimates, about 40 percent of the U.S. food supply goes uneaten. Of that uneaten amount, food thrown away in homes and foodservice makes up over half of the total amount of food waste.

When we are trying to stretch our food budget, why would we waste food? It may seem unlikely, but research shows that the very tips we follow to save money – such as buying groceries in bulk, monthly shopping trips (rather than frequent, smaller trips) and cooking once for multiple meals have been shown to lead to food waste.

What can we do? Studies show that better meal planning and careful food storage help prevent food waste. Many easy practices help us use food more wisely. Start by planning meals you would like to prepare at home, and writing down what foods you will need. A key strategy is making a list of what you will need to buy – what is already on hand in the refrigerator or cupboard?

Cutting our own food waste is something each of us, as global citizens in a hungry world, can work on. Being aware of our food habits is an important first step.

Leftovers

Leftovers can be money-saving, or they can be food-wasting! Safe, careful storage of leftover prepared food and extra ingredients prevents food waste. Wrap or cover leftovers to prevent drying in the refrigerator. Store fruits and vegetables properly – for maximum life, some should be kept in the refrigerator, while others should be stored at room temperature.

Here is a list of proven ways to fight food waste.

- Shop the refrigerator and cupboard shelf before going to the store. Make a list, and use what’s on hand before buying more!
- Check your refrigerator temperature – by keeping it at 40° F. or below, food will stay fresh longer.
- Fix the right amount of food. If leftovers sometimes go uneaten, consider cutting that stew recipe in half before you buy extra ingredients and cook too much.

How to Keep Produce Fresh Longer

Fruits and vegetables are often stored improperly. This improper storage causes them to go bad quickly and ultimately get thrown away. Take steps to store your food properly to reduce food waste.

Some fruits and vegetables should be stored in the refrigerator while others are cold-sensitive and should be stored at room temperature. Make sure you store your produce in the proper place to increase its life span.

In the Refrigerator store apples, cantaloupe, figs plums apricots, honeydew, cauliflower, cucumber, cabbage, broccoli, lettuce and Brussel sprouts.

At room temperature store uncut avocados, peaches, bananas, watermelon tomatoes, and nectarines.

Never refrigerate uncut potatoes, onions, winter squash or garlic. Keep them in a cool, dark, dry cabinet.

