Reducing Food Waste at Home

Food waste is a big problem in the United States. According to Feeding America, 25-40% of the food grown, processed, and transported in the US will never be eaten. On average, $370 worth of food per person each year is wasted.¹

When this is broken down by type of food, the amount of each food group wasted is:

• Proteins—$140 per year
• Vegetables—$66 per year
• Dairy—$60 per year
• Fruits—$45 per year
• Added Fat and Sugar—$37 per year
• Grains—$22 per year

In Iowa, food is the number one source of solid waste in landfills. In fact, food waste accounts for 20 percent of all waste being landfilled.² Sadly, 6.9 percent of residential landfilled waste is food in its original, unopened package. Food waste is not only harmful to the environment, but it also means wasted natural resources and wasted money for your family.

Learn about steps you can take to keep food waste to a minimum in your home.

**PLAN**

- Stay organized. Arrange supplies so the oldest items are in front so you will see and use them first. Use see-through storage containers for leftovers. Label, date, and freeze them in meal-size servings.
- Plan meals and snacks. This will help you determine what you need to buy and ways you can use up food you have on hand, including leftovers. Make leftovers fun by making them part of a new dish.
- Check what you have on hand. Check your refrigerator, freezer, and cupboard for foods that need to be used up and include in your meal plan.
- Plan for leftovers. For example, if you are making a big pot of spaghetti on Monday, work it into your menu plan later in the week to be sure it doesn’t go to waste.
- Make a grocery list. Write the item and the amount you need so you buy what you can use before it spoils.

**SHOP**

- Buy only what you need. If you buy extra food that is on sale, have a plan for how to use it or how you will store it for future use.
- Check the dates on foods. If you purchase meat or other perishables with a short use by date, plan to cook or freeze them quickly.
- Shop the dairy aisle last. This will help prevent the items from becoming too warm in the cart and causing them to spoil faster.

**COOK**

- Cut up blemished or damaged fruit for salads or snack cups.
- Add nearly-too-ripe fruit to yogurt or use in smoothies, muffins, cobblers, or crisps.
- Create a ready-for-soup container. Label a freezer bag and add chopped broccoli stems, cauliflower core, leftover onion, green pepper, mushrooms, or cooked vegetables as available. Add them to canned, frozen, or homemade soup.
- Use nearly stale bread for French toast, stuffing, breadcrumbs, or croutons.
- To use up leftover meat or beans, mix them with rice, pasta, or vegetables or use them in soup.

**REFERENCES**


For more ideas, tips, and recipes go to: spendsmart.extension.iastate.edu

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³ Reducing Food Waste at Home: PLAN, SHOP, COOK
FOOD STORAGE TIPS

Store food appropriately and keep perishable products at a safe temperature. Keep your refrigerator at or below 40° F.

Dairy
- Refrigerate all dairy products within two hours of purchase. Store milk in the refrigerator’s main compartment; it is colder than the door.
- Refrigerate all cheeses in their original packaging until opened. Wrap cheese tightly after use to prevent mold from growing.
- Milk generally stays fresh for one week after opening if it is kept refrigerated at 40ºF or lower and the container is closed.

Fruits and Vegetables
- Use fresh items first; have an immediate plan for using fresh berries, cherries, and salad greens that can spoil quickly.
- Freeze fresh fruit if it will not be eaten soon.
- Store vegetables and fruits in separate drawers in the refrigerator to protect them from bruising and to help control moisture. In general, fruits like low humidity and vegetables like high humidity.
- If you can’t use all your cooked veggies, they can be frozen in an airtight container.

Grains
- Store bread you will use soon in an airtight container at room temperature. Freeze the rest in airtight freezer packaging and use within six months. Storing bread in the refrigerator can cause it to dry out.
- Whole grain products like whole-wheat pasta and brown rice can be stored in the cupboard at room temperature. Whole-wheat flour is best kept in the freezer. It can go rancid if it is stored at room temperature for too long.

Protein
- Eggs will keep in the refrigerator for three weeks after their sell by date. Store eggs in the refrigerator’s main compartment; it is colder than the door.
- When storing fresh meat in your refrigerator, put it on the lowest shelf on a plate. This way if it leaks, juices will not contaminate other foods.
- Raw ground meat stays fresh in the freezer for three to four months, larger pieces of meat like steaks or chops will be good for four to 12 months. At 0ºF, frozen foods remain safe indefinitely but quality may be affected.
- If storing meat more than a month or two, place the store package inside a plastic freezer bag and overwrap it with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap or freezer paper. Label with contents and date.

WRAPS “YOUR WAY”

INGREDIENTS
1 teaspoon spread, such as low fat mayonnaise, ranch dressing, or mustard
1/2 cup vegetables (shredded, sliced, or chopped)(lettuce, tomato, slaw mix, cucumber, onion, carrot)
1 (8 inch) whole wheat tortilla
1 ounce cooked sliced chicken or beef, 1/4 cup tuna, 1 hard cooked egg, or 1/4 cup refried beans
1 tablespoon shredded cheese

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Mix the spread and the vegetables together.
2. Spread vegetable mixture on tortilla.
3. Spoon on the meat, egg, or beans and sprinkle on the cheese.
4. Roll up and eat or wrap in a paper towel and heat in microwave for 30 seconds to melt cheese.

Nutrition Facts
- Servings: 1
- Serv. size: 1 wrap
- Amount per serving: Calories 230, Total Fat 9g (14% DV), Sat. Fat 3g (15% DV), Trans Fat 0g, Cholesterol 35mg (12% DV), Sodium 420mg (18% DV), Total Carb. 25g (8% DV), Fiber 4g (16% DV), Total Sugars 2g, Protein 15g, Vit. D (0% DV), Calcium (0% DV), Iron (3% DV), Potas. (5% DV).