

## Reducing Food Waste

Each year, the average American family of four loses \$1,500 due to uneaten food. In 2015, the USDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency set a goal to cut US food waste by 50% by the year 2030. Why should we reduce food waste? Two reasons include reducing the volume of waste our waste management systems need to process and reducing the methane and other greenhouse gases given off by that waste.

Below is what you as an individual can do to reduce food waste. By following a few simple practices, you can reduce your food waste:

1. **Plan ahead**, to reduce the chance that you'll buy more than you need. Take note of which refrigerated items you frequently throw out, and next time buy them in smaller quantities. Remember you can always do a second trip if you run out. When you buy large quantities of a perishable item, make sure that you have a "doable" plan for using that item.
2. **Store** your food correctly to extend its life.
  - a. Know which parts of the refrigerator are the coldest and the warmest. For example, avoid putting perishables like milk on the refrigerator door where the temperature varies more and is warmer. Place eggs and dairy products on the lower shelves and in the back of the refrigerator where it is cooler.
  - b. The bottom back is the coldest area and is where meats and other foods that need the coldest temperatures should go.
  - c. Foods high in vinegar and salt can be placed on the refrigerator door because the vinegar and salt act as natural preservatives. Examples of these ~~types of~~ products are ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.
  - d. Store fruits and vegetables like apples, pears, mushrooms, and citrus in the low humidity crisper, and vegetables like leafy greens, cauliflower, cucumber, and lettuce in the high humidity crisper.
  - e. Do not store certain foods together -- for example, don't store bananas, avocados, cantaloupe, or melons with other fruit. Certain fruits like bananas give off ethylene which speeds up ripening and can shorten the shelf life of fruit stored close by.
  - f. Learn about which foods do not need to be stored in the refrigerator and are better tasting when stored at room temperature. Examples of this type of foods are tomatoes, bread, potatoes, and onions. (Store potatoes and onions in a dark location.)
  - g. Store nuts and seeds in the refrigerator in closed containers to extend their life.
3. **Eat or preserve** your leftovers. Place leftover food in containers with marked contents and date them to increase the chances the leftovers will be remembered and eaten. If you don't think you'll eat the leftovers right away, ~~then~~ allow the food to cool and place it in the freezer.
4. **Understand** food date labels:
  - a. Best if used by means the product is at its best flavor or quality until the listed date but is still safe if there are no signs of spoiling and it was stored properly.
  - b. Freeze by date tells you about the date by which a product should be frozen to maintain peak quality, but this date is not a safety date.
  - c. Use by date is the date that is recommended for use of a product while it is at peak quality, but the product still may be safe if there are no signs of spoilage, and the product was store properly.
  - d. The sell by date tells a store how long a product can be displayed as a food. This date is used for inventory and is not ~~as~~ a safety date.
5. Please consider these tips to reduce food waste at home. By reducing the amount of food that is wasted, you can have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions right here in our Orange County communities.

6. Here are resources to provide more information:

<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2020/06/08/how-reduce-food-waste-home>

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app>

<https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2020/11/17/tips-reduce-food-waste-thanksgiving>

<https://www.usda.gov/foodlossandwaste/consumers>

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-Food-Date-Labeling-Infographic.pdf>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/food-product-dating>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/freezing-and-food-safety>

<https://www.delish.com/food/a48236/smart-ways-to-reduce-food-waste/>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/food-dining/2022/04/01/food-waste-how-to-organize-your-fridge-to-reduce-food-you-throw-away/7237950001/>

<https://www.ecohome.net/guides/3683/fridge-organization-reduce-food-waste-live-more-sustainably/>