

29 Smart and Easy Tips to Reduce Food Waste

By Laura Newcomer

Ah, childhood meals: Flinging peas at your sister, hiding more peas under the mashed potatoes, and being scolded by an adult for avoiding the consumption of said peas — “Clean your plate! There are starving kids in Africa.” At a young age, we learned to feel guilty for wasting food while other people don’t have any. And maybe we should. Because here’s something astounding: The amount of food waste produced globally each year is more than enough to feed the nearly 1 billion hungry people in the world.

But does that mean we should stuff ourselves even when we’re full? Nope, that’s not helping anybody. So what’s a pea-hating child-turned-adult to do?

First of all, don’t let the guilt paralyze you. Cutting back on food waste is incredibly easy, and we’ve made it even simpler by putting together 29 tips designed to reduce food waste at the grocery store, at home, and during meals.

Sir (or Madam) Waste-a-Lot — The Need to Know

Experts tend to differentiate between food loss and food waste. Food loss occurs when food is thrown out or somehow decreases in quality during processing (i.e., before it hits supermarket shelves); it’s mostly an issue in so-called developing countries. Food waste, on the other hand, tends to be a major issue in “developed” countries such as the U.S. It refers to situations when food makes it to the end of the food supply chain but still doesn’t get consumed. Currently, one third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally. That’s about 1.3 billion tons of non-worthy edibles per year, and less than a quarter of it could feed hungry people the world over.

Unfortunately, the U.S. is currently one of the largest culprits in this waste-making racket (see: the video above) . Some sources estimate Americans trash as much as 40 percent of our food supply every year, and food waste is one of the largest components of solid waste in U.S. landfills.

And we’re not just wasting food: All those groceries in the trash add up to almost \$165 billion lost annually, not to mention the environmental resources that are wasted on growing food that’s thrown away. Wasted food creates billions of tons of greenhouse gases (major culprits in climate change) and needlessly consumes precious land and water resources. All of these numbers are so startling that the U.N. has recently begun a new global campaign, Think Eat Save, dedicated to combating food wasted by consumers, retailers, and the hospitality industry.

Now that we’re all sufficiently depressed, it’s time for the good news: We as individuals can implement small changes that make a big difference in the amount of food we throw away each year. Just pick and choose from our list of tips for reducing food waste below (or go hog wild and do them all!).

Waste Not — Your Action Plan

At the Store

1. Shop smart. Plan meals, use grocery lists, and avoid impulse buys. This way, you're less likely to buy things you don't need and that you're unlikely to actually consume. Buy items only when you have a plan for using them, and wait until perishables are all used up before buying more.
2. Buy exactly what you need. For example, if a recipe calls for two carrots, don't buy a whole bag. Instead, buy loose produce so you can purchase the exact number you'll use. Likewise, try buying grains, nuts, and spices from bulk bins so you can measure out exactly what you need and don't over-buy (Just note that there's a difference between buying in bulk and buying from bulk bins; the first one can actually create more waste if we buy more than we can realistically use). Bonus: This tip will save some cash, to boot.
3. Be realistic. If you live alone, you won't need the same number of apples as a family of four (unless you really like apples). If you rarely cook, don't stock up on goods that have to be cooked in order to be consumed (such as baking supplies or dried grains and beans).
4. Buy funny-looking produce. Many fruits and vegetables are thrown away because their size, shape, or colors don't quite match what we think these items "should" look like. But for the most part these items are perfectly good to eat, and buying them at a farmer's market or the grocery store helps use up food that might otherwise be tossed.
5. Have a Plan B. Let's say you buy Camembert to make a fancy dish for that fancy dinner party — and then the dinner party is canceled. Don't toss the cheese! Instead, come up with a backup recipe and use it in a different dish (or just eat it plain, because c'mon — it's cheese).

At Home

6. Practice FIFO. It stands for First In, First Out. When unpacking groceries, move older products to the front of the fridge/freezer/pantry and put new products in the back. This way, you're more likely to use up the older stuff before it expires.
7. Monitor what you throw away. Designate a week in which you write down everything you throw out on a regular basis. Tossing half a loaf of bread each week? Maybe it's time to start freezing half that loaf the moment you buy it so it doesn't go stale before you're able to eat it.
8. Take stock. Note upcoming expiration dates on foods you already have at home, and plan meals around the products that are closest to their expiration. On a similar note, keep a list of what's in the freezer and when each item was frozen. Place this on the freezer door for easy reference and use items before they pass their prime.
9. Designate one dinner each week as a "use-it-up" meal. Instead of cooking a new meal, look around in the cupboards and fridge for leftovers and other food that might otherwise get overlooked.

10. Eat leftovers! Brown-bag them for work or school for a free packed lunch. If you don't want to eat leftovers the day after they're cooked, freeze and save them for later (just remember to note when you froze them so you can use them up in a timely fashion).
11. Use it all. When cooking, use every piece of whatever food you're cooking with, whenever possible. For example, leave the skin on cucumbers and potatoes, sauté broccoli stems along with the florets (they taste good too; we promise!), and so on. Bonus: Skins and stems often provide additional nutrients for our bodies.
12. Store better. If you regularly throw away stale chips/cereal/crackers/etc., try storing them in airtight containers — this should help them keep longer (or, of course, just buy fewer of these products).
13. Repurpose leftovers scraps. Use vegetable and meat scraps in homemade stocks, and use citrus fruit rinds and zest to add flavor to other meals. Want more ideas? Check out resources for using up food scraps.
14. Check the fridge. Make sure it's functioning at maximum efficiency. Look for tight seals, proper temperature, etc. — this will ensure that the fridge keeps food fresh as long as possible.
15. Preserve produce. Produce doesn't have to be tossed just because it's reaching the end of its peak. Soft fruit can be used in smoothies; wilting vegetables can be used in soups, etc. And both wilting fruits and veggies can be turned into delicious, nutritious juice.
16. Donate what you won't use. Never going to eat that can of beans? Donate it to a food kitchen before it expires so it can be consumed by someone who needs it. Check out resources to locate a food bank near you.
17. Donate the gross stuff, too! Many farmers happily accept food scraps for feeding pigs or adding to a compost heap. To find farms near you, check out one of these resources.
18. Store food properly in the fridge. Learn how and where to store specific products in the fridge, and they're likely to keep longer (hint: they don't call it the "produce drawer" for nothin'!).
19. Store things properly in the freezer. Same as above: How and where we store products in the freezer makes a difference in how long they'll last.
20. Can it. Got more fruit than you know what to do with? Try canning it so it'll last for months to come. (Plus, who doesn't love eating "fresh" peaches in winter?)
21. Pickle it. Both fruits and vegetables can be preserved through an easy pickling process.
22. Understand expiration dates. Turns out those expiration dates don't always have to do with food safety; rather, they're usually manufacturers' suggestions for peak quality. If stored properly, most foods (even meat) stay fresh several days past the "use-by" date. If a food looks, smells, and tastes okay, it should be fine. If any of these elements are off, then it's time to toss it.

23. Compost! Hate potato skins? Don't feel like turning wilted vegetables into soup stock? No worries; food scraps still don't need to be tossed. Just start a compost pile in the backyard or even under the sink, and convert food waste into a useful resource.

During Mealtime

24. Check in with your belly. Here it is, ladies and gentlemen: The solution to the "clean your plate!" issue. Simply take a moment to ask your body what it wants to eat, and how much — and then serve yourself that. Or simply start with less food on your plate. If you want more, you can always go back for it — but this way you won't find out that you're full and still have a heap of food in front of you. In fact, one study found that reducing portion sizes is an easy way to reduce food waste.

25. Split the dish. If eating out, split a dish with a friend so you don't waste half of the giant portion sizes found at many restaurants.

26. Take home leftovers. Even if you're not into splitting meals, those portion sizes don't have to be wasted. Just ask to take leftovers home (bonus eco points if you bring your own reusable container!), and you've got yourself a free lunch the next day.

27. Share. Made a quadruple recipe of a casserole you ended up disliking? Gift it to friends, family, or neighbors — they're likely to be grateful for the saved money and time.

28. Go trayless. When eating in a cafeteria, skip the tray. Doing so is associated with a reduction in food waste, possibly because it's harder for people to carry more food than they can actually eat.

29. Educate other people. Sure, nobody likes a Debbie Downer at the dinner table. But turns out simply being aware of the issue of food waste can help make people more attentive to wasting less.

Tips To Reduce Food Waste

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1. The amount of food waste produced globally each year is more than enough to feed nearly 1 _____ hungry people in the world.
2. _____ is when food makes it to the end of the food supply chain but still doesn't get consumed.
3. Americans trash as much as 25 percent of our food supply every year.
True or False?
4. Wasted food creates billions of tons of _____ gases and needlessly consumes precious land and water resources.
5. Buying funny looking produce can help to eliminate food waste because often times these items are thrown out even though they are perfectly good to eat.
True or False?
6. Practicing FIFO means moving older products to the _____ of the fridge/freezer/pantry and putting new products in the _____.
7. Produce skins and stems often provide additional nutrients for our bodies.
True or False?
8. Making sure your refrigerator is functioning at maximum _____ will ensure that food keeps fresh as long as possible.
9. Always throw away food if it past the "used by" date, even if it looks, smells and tastes okay.
True or False?
10. Reducing _____ sizes is an easy way to reduce food waste.

September Quiz Answers. 1. Added Sugar 2. Cancer 3. False 4. Fructose
5.False 6. Organ System 7. Endorphins 8. Glucose Levels 9. Breakfast
10. True



Southwest Human Development Services
P.O. Box 28487 • Austin, Texas 78755-8487
(512) 467-7916 • Toll Free (800) 369-9082
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