

How to Reduce Food Waste

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Image courtesy of the author

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that the United States wastes between 30-40 percent of our entire food supply. That sounds bad enough already, but to put it in perspective, that comes out to around 133 billion pounds of food per year. According to the USDA, about 40 million people per year struggle with hunger to some degree. We are throwing billions of pounds of food in the trash while other people are going hungry. In 2015 the USDA joined forces with the US Environmental Protection Agency in an effort to reduce food waste in the United States by half by the year 2030.

Food waste is not only unacceptable from an ethical and moral point of view but also poses a major environmental problem. Food waste represents a 90% burden on the environment as its decomposition produces gases that have a strong impact on climate change. Nowadays, food production:

- Contributes to global warming more than cars, trucks, planes, and trains combined
- Accounts for 70 percent of global freshwater withdrawals
- Reduces worldwide water quality- farms discharge large quantities of agrochemicals, organic matter, drug residues, sediments and saline reducing the overall quality of many water bodies
- Accelerates the loss of biodiversity (intensive farming decreases traditional and old varieties and species of agricultural plants and thus related genetic diversity).
- Is the main driver of the Earth's deforestation and devastation
- Is increasing at a rapid pace - in the last 30 years, food production has increased by more than 100 percent.

By focusing on reducing food waste, we can not only save money but also reduce the amount of CO2 emission into the atmosphere, a winning combination in the time of crisis. As consumers, we forget the power we have, many of us many many choices when it comes to purchasing our food. We can say a lot towards this issue simply with our actions. If reducing food waste is important to you, read ahead for several tips and tricks.

Shop Smart

It might seem rather obvious, but the first and possibly most important rule for reducing food waste is to not buy more food than you need in the first place. Many people can relate to the idea of coming home with a trunk full of groceries, and realizing as you unpack them that at least half of what you bought is junk that won't be used to make any specific meal. There are several methods of reducing the amount of unnecessary food you get from the grocery store. Shopping with a plan, rather than just a budget, is not only a great way to save some money, but it will also significantly reduce the amount of food waste that you and your family produce.

1. **Make a list:** Making a list of the groceries you need, then actually sticking to the list can help to discourage impulse buying, which usually leads to excess. If you struggle to stick to the list, try allowing yourself one item not included on the list. This will allow a little room for impulsivity without creating too much waste.
2. **Eat before you shop:** Shopping when you're hungry is a recipe for disaster. People that shop while hungry tend to choose their food with their stomach rather than their brain.
3. **Shop online:** If you are constantly returning from the grocery store with more than you need, consider using one of the many delivery services available today. Shopping online is not only easy and convenient, but it also takes away the temptation of walking through aisle after aisle of food that you don't need.
4. **Plan your meals:** This goes hand-in-hand with making a list, except that in this case you're not just writing down what you want to buy, but specifically planning each individual meal. By doing this, you can purchase only the ingredients you need for each meal, effectively reducing your food waste to zero. If you know that you need exactly two pounds of hamburger to make meatloaf, then you won't find yourself grabbing three pounds as a rough estimate.
5. **Start in the middle:** Most grocery stores are designed to flow from the outer aisles to the inside. This means that a great deal of effort goes into placing the products where you will see them and hopefully buy them on impulse. If you buck the system and start in the middle of the store, you ruin the carefully planned flow and reduce your chances of buying products that you don't need. Go straight to the items on your list, rather than circling around to them.

Don't be so quick to toss expired food

Interest in waste reduction has grown further during the new coronavirus pandemic, as the public is concerned about the potential effects of food waste on the food chain.

Consumers are still looking for foods that have a longer shelf life, as they think they have bought something of better quality. If food ends up in the trash, we have not only thrown away money and food, but we have affected the entire economy of the food chain, from transportation costs to the farm. Many consumers are unaware that dates on foods are at the discretion of manufacturers and are not supported by reliable scientific evidence. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, ninety percent of Americans toss food prematurely due to a misunderstanding of food labels. "Best before" and "Use by date" dates are intended for consumer use but are typically the date the manufacturer deems the product reaches peak freshness. It's not a date to indicate spoilage, nor does it necessarily signal that the food is no longer safe to eat.

Write Down Your Waste

This might seem like an odd thing to do, but making a list of your food waste can help to reduce it. When we do things out of habit, and without putting too much thought into it, it is much easier to do those things in excess. Making a list of the things that you throw away means that you will have to think about it before you do it, and you'll be able to see whether you're being wasteful or not. The other benefit of making a list is that it gives you a reference for reducing your waste. With a list, you know how much waste you are producing, so you can make a realistic plan on how much you'd like to reduce that number.

Eat your leftovers

There's really no point in suggesting that people save their leftovers since most people already do. The problem is, most people save their leftovers for too long, and end up throwing them away. The key here is to plan what you're going to do with your leftovers as soon as you have them. For instance, you can plan to take them to work with you the next day for lunch. Another option is to pack them in the kids' lunch for school. If neither of those options is plausible, consider serving the leftovers for dinner the next night. The plus side to that is, you get a night off from cooking.

Portion Control

Many of us are already looking for a way to get healthier, and maybe shed a few pounds while we're at it. Why not make a little extra effort to consider the size of each portion when serving dinner. With a simple Google search, you can figure out what portion size is considered healthy for you based on your height, weight, and lifestyle. This will mean that you won't fill your plate, and only end up eating half of what you took. This is a great way to reduce waste and stay fit.

Food Prep

This kind of goes along with portion control, but it expands upon the idea. By preparing your ingredients early, and even separating them into the right measurements, you can reduce the amount of food that is left over after preparing a meal. By doing this, you can not only plan what to do with the ingredients you need, but you can make plans with what you know you'll have left over. For example, if you buy two pounds of hamburger, but you only need a pound and a half for your recipe, you can plan a snack or side of some kind with the extra half pound. Otherwise, leftover ingredients have a tendency to be forgotten and eventually thrown away.

Eat Healthily

This tip plays off of the last tips a little bit since portion control and food prep are big parts of a healthy diet, but the other important aspect of it is what kind of foods you eat. Heavy, greasy foods might satisfy your cravings at the moment, but it doesn't give your body what it needs to produce lasting energy. Instead of creating energy, greasy and sugary foods are stored in our bodies as fat, which leaves us still needing the energy to get through the day, so we eat more. Unhealthy eating habits inevitably lead to [excessive eating](#), which leads to waste.

Clean The Refrigerator

When your fridge is overly cluttered, it's easy to overlook leftovers and food that isn't being used. It's also easier to forget that you have something already, and end up buying it again when you didn't actually need it. Cleaning out the refrigerator on a regular basis will reduce clutter, which makes planning and organizing easier and more efficient. The same goes for food pantries or anywhere else your food is stored.

Donate What You Don't Need

Many of us could look through our fridge and pantry right now and find several items that we don't need. In fact, chances are there are items in your kitchen that you can confidently say you will never use. Instead of letting it all build up until you get sick of the mess and end up throwing it away, why not find a local food pantry or homeless shelter to donate to? We mentioned earlier that millions of people go hungry every year all over the world. Why not give that unused or unwanted food to someone in need? Donating your extra food feels great because you're helping hungry people in need, and reducing waste.

Be Conscientious of Your Waste

Just as an overall philosophy in your day to day life, you can try to be more aware of how much you're wasting. We toss a great deal of food without ever giving it much thought. It's great to live in a time when food is so plentiful that we have too much, rather than too little; but before you throw those leftovers away, take a moment to think of the many people that

are going without. If everyone gives a little extra time and effort, we can reduce food waste in a major way.

Let's take action

Of course, the message is clear: don't throw food away! Let's turn a global tragedy into an opportunity. With less food waste, each country can save millions of euros, and at the same time make significant economic gains through sensible investments, as this creates many new green jobs and reduces CO2 emissions into the atmosphere.

An individual and an organization that is aware of its power in a consumer society can influence the revolution of the entire food industry as well as society. We just have to work for a common goal.

So, ladies and gentlemen, what are we waiting for?

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