

How To Reduce Food Waste

Did you know that almost 40% of waste going to the landfill is wasted food? Thirty-eight percent of it is edible food that could have been eaten. There was nothing wrong with it other than maybe it was ugly, damaged packaging, lack of interest or not knowing what to do with leftovers or a misunderstanding of food labels. Besides the importance of not throwing away perfectly good food, grocery bills are going up and with more people in need of help with food, this is a good time to look at How to Reduce Wasting Food.

Plan Meals

First, make a list by taking a look around the cupboards and fridge to see what you already have and can use. It might be that you already have an ingredient or can use those leftovers to make a meal. Make sure to shop and buy only what you need and then use what you buy. Check out Savethefood.com for an easy-to-use Meal Prep Mate.

Buy the Ugly Fruits and Vegetables

The trend is changing but some stores still reject imperfect “ugly” produce. These fruits and vegetables are still delicious so give them a try and keep them from being wasted.

Donate

If you ended up buying too much food that you will not eat soon consider donating to a local food pantry. Contact the pantry directly to learn the items they accept and when.

Chill the Fridge Out

Is your fridge at the right temperature? The FDA recommends your fridge is at 40 degrees or below

and your freezer at 0 degrees to protect your food and keep your food safe and fresh for longer. Your food can last at least three days longer in the fridge and even longer in the freezer. Purchase a small thermometer to keep in the fridge and freezer and monitor the temperature often. If you are not sure how to set the temperature in your fridge contact the manufacturer.

Organize Your Fridge

Practice “First In First Out” (FIFO) by shifting the older foods to the front of the fridge, freezer or pantry and put new ones in the back so you remember to eat them before they spoil and go bad. Set up, and label an “Eat Soon” or “Eat First” section shelf, or bin dedicated to items that need to be eaten soon. For families, make sure the shelf is where the kids can see it and get them involved!

Use Leftovers

Leftovers, and foods needing to be eaten soon and overripe fruits and vegetables, can be mixed together to make another meal! There are recipes, and programs, to help you. Check out Hellmann’s Make Taste, Not Waste campaign, Save the Food or Love Food Hate Waste websites for some tasty recipes.

How Long to Keep Food to Avoid Wasting It

You likely can see and smell that some foods are no longer good to eat. But what about other food? Check out the [Food Safety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov) FoodKeeper tool or try the Save the Food Storage Interactive Storage Guide.

Food Product Dating Labels

Confused by those “Sell By”, “Best if Used By/Before”, “Use By” or “Freeze

By” date labels on food packages? You are not alone. Except for infant formula, the dates on packing are not safety dates. See the USDA’s explanation for each.

“Best if Used By/Before”

date indicates when a product will be of best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.

“Sell-By”

date tells the store how long to display the product for sale for inventory management. It is not a safety date.

“Use-By”

date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. It is not a safety date except for when used on infant formulas.

Grow Your Own

Another cost saving approach is to grow your own food. Check out WVU Extension Gardening Guide which includes container gardening and gardening with limited space and WVU Campus Food Garden and Urban Farm. Both are available to the public.

Compost

Composting is another way to reduce food waste going to the landfill. Start at home or consider a community composting area. The WVU Campus Food Garden and Urban Farm not only shows you how to grow your own food but they offer composting classes too.

To learn more about how to reduce food waste visit our website monongaliacountyswa.com, subscribe to our e-newsletter or follow us on Facebook or Nextdoor.