

# What can you do at home to reduce or prevent food waste?

**No one buys food with the intention of throwing it away.** But food waste was the top item thrown away by Americans accounting for 21 percent of the nation's waste in 2013 according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Much of this food waste occurs at home. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that on average a family of four disposes nearly \$1,500 worth of food each year. Here are some basic recommendations on how you can prevent or reduce food waste at home.

## Smart Shopping: Buy only what you need.

Planning is the key to avoiding wasted food. By making a list with weekly meals in mind, you can save money, time and eat healthier.

### BEFORE YOU SHOP

- **Plan your meals for the week before you go shopping.** How many meals will you eat at home? Will you or your family eat out this week? How often? Be realistic.

- **Make a shopping list based on your planning.**
- **Include quantities on your shopping list.** Consider how many meals you will make with each item. For example, salad greens – enough for two lunches.
- **Shop your refrigerator, cupboards and pantry** before going to the store to avoid buying food you already have.
- **Consider buying from local farmers.** You may get fresher food and keep your dollars local. Visit here (<https://agriculture.sc.gov/where-to-buy-local/>) to learn where you can buy local.
- **Practice First in, First out** – better known as FIFO. When unpacking groceries, move older products to the front of your refrigerator, freezer and pantry. Put new products in the back. This way, you're more likely to use the older stuff before it expires.
- **Don't automatically throw away food** because of the date provided on the product. See box below.

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## Product Dating: What does it really mean?

All of those dates on food products – sell by, use by, best if used by – are not an indicator of food safety. So what do they mean?

- **"Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale.** You should buy the product before the date expires.
- **A "Best if Used By (or Before)" date is recommended for best flavor or quality.** It is not a purchase or safety date.

- **A "Use-By" date is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality.** The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **"Closed or coded dates" are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.**

Visit here <http://savethefood.com/tips/deciphering-dates-on-products> to learn more about deciphering dates on products.

## WHILE SHOPPING

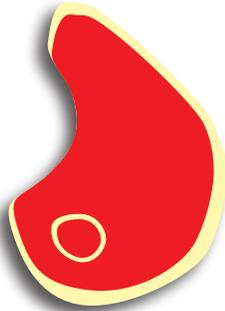
- **Choose loose fruit and vegetables over pre-packaged** to better control the quantity you need and ensure fresher ingredients.
- **Try to avoid pre-cut fruits and vegetables.** They tend to spoil more quickly. It also will save you money.
- **Don't be tempted by sales.** Buying in bulk only saves money if you can use the food before it spoils. Good items to buy in bulk include grains, beans and pasta.
- **Ask the butcher to repackage meat if there is more than you need.**
- **Use reusable shopping bags.** Make sure your items – particularly fruit and vegetables – are stored carefully in your shopping bag.

## Smart Prep: Prep now, eat later.

Prepare perishable foods soon after shopping. You'll make it easier to whip up meals later in the week, saving time, effort and money.

### RIGHT AWAY

- **Wash, dry, chop, dice, slice and place your fresh food items in clear storage containers** for snacks and easy cooking when you get home from the store.
- **Befriend your freezer and visit it often.** Freeze food such as bread, sliced fruit or meat that you know you won't be able to eat in time.



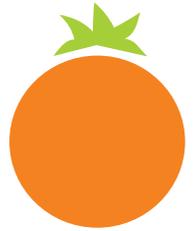
### EACH WEEK

- **Save time preparing food each week by batch cooking entire meals ahead of time** that can be stored in the fridge or freezer. For example, bake and freeze chicken breasts.
- **Keep a running list of meals that your household enjoys.** That way, you can easily choose a meal to prepare.
- **Rely on your freezer** – but remember what you froze. Keep labels and a marker handy to note what

you are freezing and the date on each container. This will help you plan meals, save money and reduce waste.

## Smart Storage: Keep it fresh.

Produce is the most wasted food. Typically, this is because we purchased too much or didn't use it in time. By storing fruits and vegetables for maximum freshness, they will taste better and last longer, helping you eat more of them before they spoil.



### WHEN BUYING

- **Choose fresh foods that freeze well** if there's a chance you won't get to eat them in time.
- **The length of time that food will last depends on how fresh it was when you bought it.** Local in-season produce will last much longer than produce that has been shipped a long way.

### HOW TO STORE

- **Learn where to store all the fruits and vegetables to keep them fresher longer.** King County (Washington) provides this useful **Fruit and Vegetable Storage Guide**. Please visit <http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/wasteprevention/documents/too-good-food-storage-guide.pdf> to view the guide.
- **Separate fruit that is very ripe from others that are not.** Many fruits give off natural gases as they ripen that make others spoil faster.
- **Store bananas, apples and tomatoes by themselves** and store fruits and vegetables in different bins.
- **Consider using storage bags or containers designed to help extend the life of produce.**
- **To prevent mold, wash berries before storing them in the refrigerator.**



Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling  
S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control

**1-800-768-7348**  
[www.scdhec.gov/recycle](http://www.scdhec.gov/recycle)