

# Environmental Moments

# Minimizing Food Waste

November Edition

## **Why is Food Waste Such a Problem?**

Thanksgiving is on the horizon, which means now is a good time to think of how to make the most of your last-minute grocery trips and delicious Thanksgiving leftovers. About one-third of food produced is never consumed (FAO). With residential waste accounting for a large proportion of that figure, this is an area where individuals' practices can have a major impact on the environment while saving money and improving your health.

However, the problem is also widespread. Perfectly good food is wasted at all stages. One of the biggest, and most surprising, driving factors for waste is aesthetics. Otherwise perfectly healthy and quality crops are buried into the soil if they aren't free of blemish, while stores refuse to display produce that isn't picture perfect. One reason for this is in our psychological distaste for space. In fact, "Research NRDC has done found that people are not comfortable with empty white space on plates or in [refrigerators] or grocery carts. There's an urge to fill those spaces with food. And in our culture, throwing food out is acceptable. In fact, leaving something on your plate is considered posh" (Wikiel). Adopting a new mindset favoring the practical use of food rather than overly worrying about its appearance will promote less food loss.



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## **The Benefits of Reducing Food Waste**

There are many reasons to be more conscientious of how much of the food you buy ends up in the garbage. Here are a few:

- Retaining money
- Improving your health by reducing overeating
- Conserving energy/resources/environment
- Saving time

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**Produced by the Utility Arborist Association Task Force and Davey Resource Group:**



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# Ways to Reduce Waste

## **Buy Less**

Not purchasing food in the first place is certainly a good way to avoid tossing it later. Bring a shopping list and stick to it. If you have a hard time thinking of what to get or don't have time to think of what goes on the list, keep a binder of recipes your family has enjoyed. Put the items you don't have for some of those recipes on the shopping list and enjoy a week of delicious, healthy meals. Also consider your portion sizes. Overbuying leads to overeating and more wasted food.

## **Proper Preparation and Storage**

What happens after you purchase the makings of a meal is also important. Doing some meal prep after shopping can help keep healthy snacks readily available and aid in whipping up meals quickly. How you store your produce is also essential for increasing the span of time you can eat them. "Many fruits give off natural gases as they ripen, making other nearby produce spoil faster. Store bananas, apples, and tomatoes by themselves, and store fruits and vegetables in different bins" (EPA). Knowing which foods or leftovers can be frozen, and the proper way to do so, can help provide quick meals and avoid meals ending up in your trashcan rather than your plate. Good foods to freeze include fruit for smoothies, meat, and baked goods.

## **Expiration Dates**

With so many terms, including "sell by", "expires by", and "best by", it is no wonder why people are confused and end up removing anything past these dates from their refrigerator. However, knowing the definitions can be the difference between enjoying a product that is still good for consumption and throwing away your food and the hard-earned money you spent on it. For "sell by" and "best by", "neither of these terms means that the product is unsafe to eat after the given date" (Kubala). As for "expires by", "the problem is, the US government doesn't regulate [this] term" (Kubala), or any of the others, for that matter. It is best to note if the product has changed noticeably in color, consistency, or texture to determine if it is safe to consume rather than these labels.

## **Works Cited**

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