



## **Focus on Food Waste...**

# **How to Reduce Food Waste at Home!**

It is estimated that 40% of food in the United States today goes uneaten, which means that Americans are not only generating a significant quantity of food waste each year, but are throwing out the equivalent of \$165 billion annually! According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, Americans disposed of more than 38 million tons of food waste in 2014. Furthermore, a recent waste composition study conducted in Mercer County, New Jersey found that food waste was the largest component in the county's solid waste stream. In fact, nearly 25% of the garbage that was sorted in this study was food waste. Once in landfills, food breaks down to produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas which contributes to climate change.

Food is wasted on the farm, some more in processing, more still in food service and finally in American kitchens. Food thrown away at home includes unopened, unexpired packages, as well as plate scrapings. Surprisingly, more food waste results from food that was not even served rather than from plate scrapings! Yes, this is food that never even got to the table! No one intends to waste food when they go shopping, but that's what happens.

How does this happen? Often, shoppers buy more than the family can eat because the grocery store offers bulk deals. In addition, people often fail to match their intentions with their actions; they save leftovers but never eat them, or they mean to serve fruit, but eat cookies. Shoppers also often buy extra when they are unsure of portion size. Furthermore, people tend to discard foods that don't fit into their normal routine; these may be new products that the family tries and dislikes, or specialty foods, such as hot dog buns. Once the hot dogs are eaten, the extra buns go stale. Consumers also discard food that is still safe because they mistake the sell-by date for an expiration date. Others make the opposite error. They have unrealistic ideas about how long food will last, and leave it in the refrigerator too long.

## **What can you do to reduce food waste?**

You can shop and serve smarter, save money and prevent waste by utilizing the strategies listed below.

- Inventory. Know what you have in the pantry and refrigerator, so you won't buy duplicates. This goes for the freezer as well: label it, date it, and use it.
- Make a point to find recipes that use ingredients you already have.
- Don't buy perishables in bulk unless you will divide and freeze them into family portions.
- Use up or avoid those "companion" foods, like hot dog rolls or mint jelly.
- Go ahead and try new products, but remember to finish them up.
- Read the fine print: throw it out on the expiration date, not the sell-by date.

Family holiday/special event dinners increase waste, so whether you're hosting or bringing food, consider:

- People are eating less candy and sweet foods. They don't need as many desserts.
- Encourage guests to bring empty food containers to take leftovers home.
- Try to get a guest count so you know how much to buy. Chefs differ in their portion estimations, but you can start with a half-pound of meat, or a little more chicken on the bone, and a cup of any side dishes, for each adult.
- Pay attention at the end of the dinner; what did you throw out? Buy less next time.
- At barbecues and tailgates, potato and macaroni salads are often left over and discarded. If you're serving too much, remember next time to buy less.
- Kids may be too busy playing to eat much. Plan small portions.
- Use leftovers in lunches. Take them to work or put them in the kids' lunchboxes.

For additional planning, storage, prep and thriftiness tips that will help you reduce the amount of food that you waste, please visit <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-home>.

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