

Wasted Food is Wasted Money



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Don't throw your money away with your leftovers. Learn how to cut down on food waste and save money in today's article.

Holiday time is upon us. It's the time of year when people start feeling the pressure of extra demands on the paychecks. Much of holiday celebrating centers around food, and that puts a strain on the average food budget. However, holiday season isn't the only time that staying within a tight food budget is necessary. It's a monthly task that takes extra planning, and any trick to save a few bucks is helpful. Here are some interesting facts that may surprise you and get you thinking about ways you can save money.

A study done by George Washington University claims that 33.19 million tons of food were wasted in the United States in 2010—enough to fill the Empire State Building 91 times. Household food waste accounts for 55-65 percent of this total. Each month the average American throws away approximately 20 pounds of food. That's 240 pounds per year at a cost of about \$370 per person! Protein foods make up the biggest waste while breads and pasta are least likely to be dumped.

Why do we toss food? The biggest reason is because it spoils before we can eat it. Other reasons may include over-purchasing perishable food, cooking big meals and throwing some of it away, or not eating everything on our plate. The International Food Information Council reports that more than half of Americans say they take leftovers home from restaurants, use leftovers from cooking, plan their meals, make shopping lists, and use or freeze leftovers in a timely manner. This is a good start, but there are other critical ways to lessen the waste.

- **Think smaller portions.** Super-sized portions are popular now. If we compare these portions to 20 years ago, many have doubled in size. We don't need the extra calories.

Using smaller plates also helps.

- **Store food correctly.** Fruits and vegetables will last much longer if stored in the proper place. Bananas and tomatoes should be stored on the counter, out of the refrigerator. Onions, garlic, potatoes and winter squash should be in a cool, dark, dry place such as a cellar for optimum storage life. Apples will last up to a week on the counter but more than a week in the fridge. Keep them away from other produce as they produce ethylene gas which causes fruit to ripen faster. Citrus fruits should be stored in a mesh bag or the crisper drawer in the fridge. Berries, grapes, and cherries should be stored, unwashed, in the fridge. Washing these before storage hastens rot.
- **Keep a tidy fridge, freezer and pantry.** If it's out of sight, it's usually out of mind. Much of fridge food isn't discovered until it has grown green fuzzies. Remember that freezer food doesn't last forever but dries out over time. When you bring new groceries home, move the older food to the front of the pantry or freezer and consume them first.
- **Understand expiration dates.** A "Sell-By" date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires. The "Best if Used By" date is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date. "Use-By" dates usually refer to best quality and are not safety dates. Even if the date expires during home storage, a product should be safe, wholesome, and of good quality if handled properly. Trust your sense of smell and sight in these cases.
- **Be conscious of what you throw away and why.** This way you can prevent the same from happening again.

Getting the most for our money is important. Some of these ideas may seem overwhelming but once practiced, they become habits that add extra money to our wallets and lessen budget

stress.

This article was written by Ellen Serfustini, FCS Agent, Utah State University Extension