Wasted Food is Wasted Money



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.

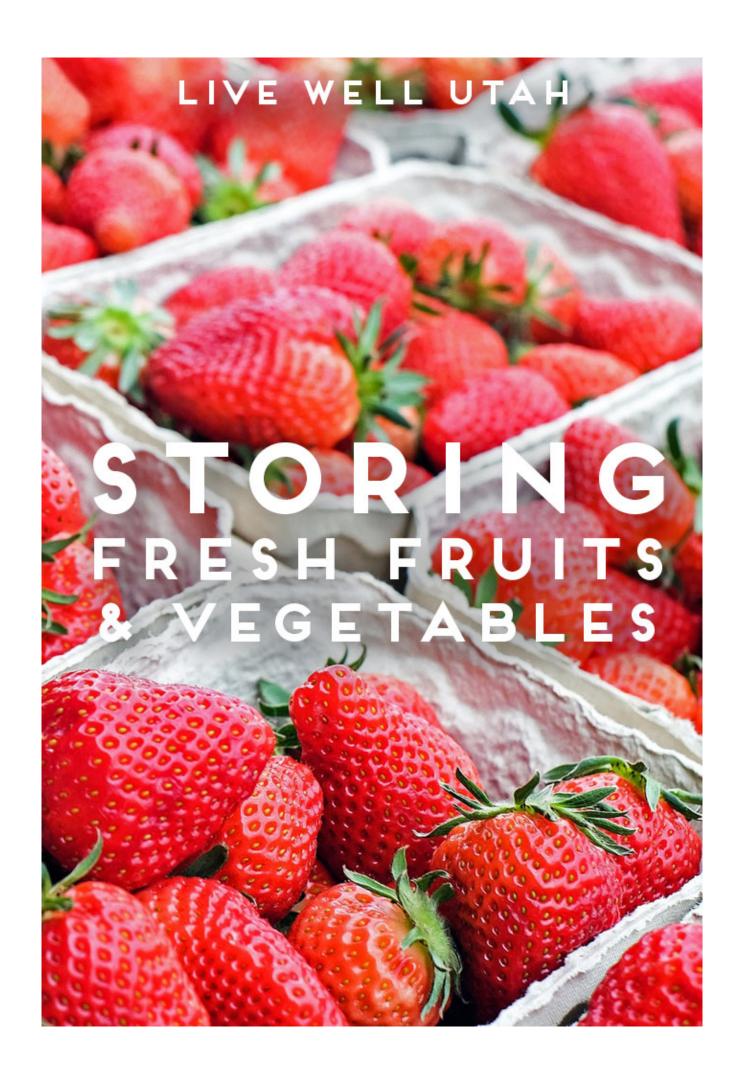
- Store food correctly. Fruits and vegetables will last much longer if stored in the proper place. Bananas and tomatoes should be stored on the counter, out of the refrigerator. Onions, garlic, potatoes and winter squash should be in a cool, dark, dry place such as a cellar for optimum storage life. 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

Ask an Expert // Storing Fresh Fruits and Vegetables



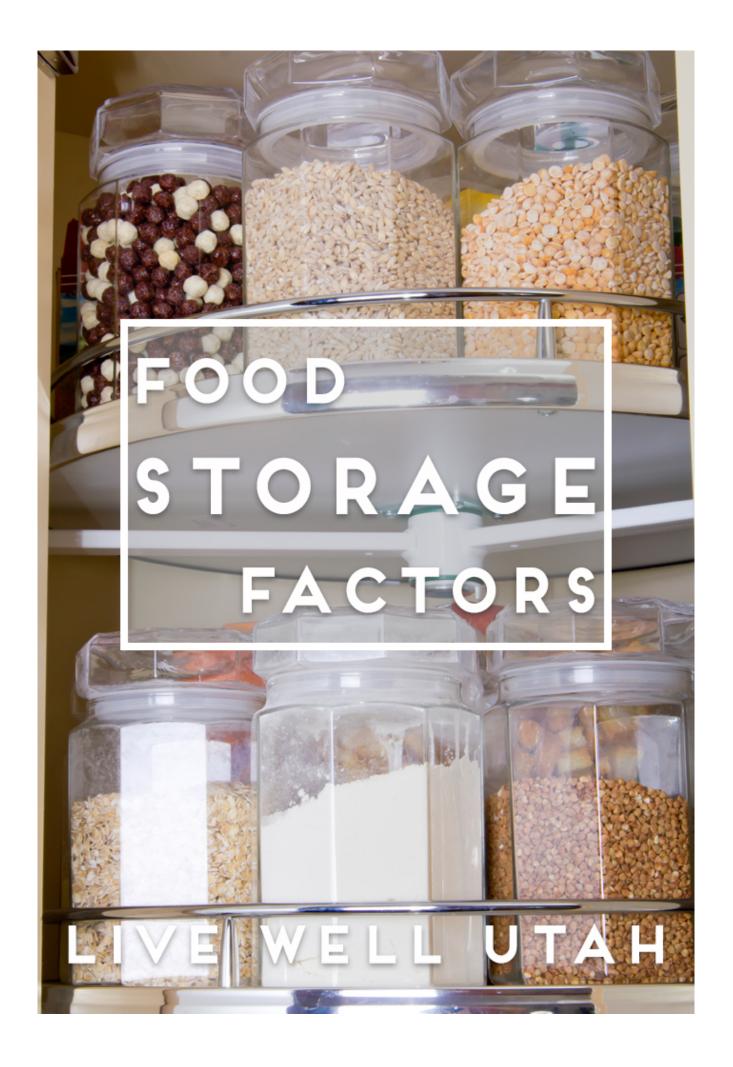
Have you been to a farmers market yet this year? Whether it's from a farmers market or a grocery store, don't let that fresh produce spoil on your counter. Here are some tips on how to store fruits and vegetables so they last longer.

One of the benefits of shopping at farmers markets is the fruits and vegetables are often fresher than those at most grocery stores. Much of the produce was picked within a couple of days, or even hours of the market. Fresher fruits and vegetables will last a little longer before they begin to spoil. But, there are also some additional things you can do at home to help your produce last even longer. Follow these fruit and vegetable storage recommendations to reduce the amount of produce that spoils before you can use it. Use this chart to identify fruits and vegetables that spoil the quickest and be sure to use those first.

	Produce	Storage Time	Storage Recommendations
Group 1	Apples	1-2 months	These items can be kept at room temperature to ripen. Refrigerate (40°F) for a longer life. DO NOT refrigerate tomatoes until fully ripened. Store these fruits away from other produce. They may cause other produce to rot.
	Apricots	1-2 weeks	
	Peaches	2-3 weeks	
	Pears	3-4 weeks	
	Melons	1-2 weeks	
	Tomatoes	1-2 weeks	
Group 2	Cherries	1-2 weeks	Keep these items refrigerated (40°F). For higher quality, cover with a damp paper towel. Do not wash until ready to use.
	Fresh herbs	1 week	
	Leafy greens	1-2 weeks	
	Raspberries	1 week	
	Strawberries	1 week	
Group 3	Beets	2-3 weeks	Keep these items refrigerated (40°F). For better quality, these can be stored in an unsealed or vented plastic bag. Other produce in this group includes oranges, celery, radishes, and parsnips.
	Carrots	2-3 weeks	
	Corn	1 week	
	Peppers	1-2 weeks	
	Summer squash	1-2 weeks	
Group 4	Cucumbers	1-2 weeks	These items are easily damaged by cold. Keep these items refrigerated (40°F), but check daily for signs of rot. The fridge door is best. Do not wash until ready to use.
	Green beans	1 week	
	Eggplant	1 week	
Group 5	Garlic	4-5 months	These items do not need refrigeration. Store in a cool room (50-60°F). For better quality, store these on a wire rack or hang in a net bag so air can flow. Do not wash until ready to use.
	Onion	5-6 months	
	Potatoes	5-6 months	

This article was written by Heidi LeBlanc, Food \$ense State Director, and Casey Coombs, RD, CD; Policy, Systems, and Environments Coordinator, Utah State University Food \$ense

Food Storage Factors



Make sure your food storage is safe and ready to use so you can utilize it in any situation-even in an emergency!

Food for Thought

Storing food is a traditional domestic skill that has been used for thousands of years in times of plenty to prepare for times of famine or when food is in short supply. Wheat found stored in vessels in the tombs of Egypt was still edible after 4,000 years. Food is preserved and stored to be eaten from harvest to harvest as families strive to be self-sustainable. Maintaining a food supply often ensures savings of time and money and provides safety and security in time of need. Storing food has several main purposes:

- Preserves harvested and processed foods for later use
- Provides a balanced diet throughout the year
- Helps prepare for disasters, emergencies, and periods of food scarcity or famine
- Religious reasons
- Peace of mind
- Self-sustainability

Factors that affect food storage:

Temperature: The temperature at which food is stored is very critical to shelf life. The best range for food storage is a constant temperature between 40-60 degrees. Avoid freezing temperatures.

Moisture: It is recommended to remove moisture when storing foods. For long-term storage, foods should have a 10 percent or less moisture content.

Oxygen: Foods store best when oxygen free.

Light: Light transfers energy to the food products causing

them to degrade in nutrition and appearance. Store food in dark areas.

Container: Store foods in food-grade plastic, metal or glass containers indicating that the container does not contain chemicals that could be transferred to food and be harmful to your health.

For best storage life, use containers with a hermetic (air tight) seal. Containers with air-tight seals are:

- #10 cans
- Sealable food storage buckets
- Sealable food quality metal (lined) or plastic drums
- Foil pouches
- PETE bottles (for dry products such as wheat, corn, and beans)

Infestation: Insects can damage your food storage. Prevent these with cold treatments and proper storage conditions.

Shelf date is the "best if used by" date. The "life sustaining shelf life" date means the length of time that food is still edible. "Sell by" means the store should sell the product by the printed date. "Best if used by" means the consumer should use the product by the date listed for best quality and flavor (not for safety reasons).

Utah State University Extension: http://extension.usu.edu/foodstorage/htm/storage-conditions

This article was written by Carolyn Washburn, Extension Agent, Washington County

Get Creative! // Storage in a Small Space



Here are some fun and creative ways to store food and emergency supplies when space is tight!

Becoming the Master of Disguise

September is National Preparedness Month, and for many people that means stocking up at the case lot sale, storing water and updating 72-hour kits. However, not everyone has the luxury of ample storage space. For those who live in a small house, apartment or dorm, finding a place to store extra food and emergency preparedness items can be a challenge.

Carolyn Washburn, Utah State University Extension associate professor, said it might require a little creativity to find storage space, but it can usually be done.

"Closets are great places to start since there is often unused space," she said. "Food can be stored in the very top back

shelves that you can't use or on the floor in the back of the closet. Also consider the back of cupboards where access is difficult. For instance if you have number 10 cans, you can store them in the back of the cupboard and leave them, then place the foods you use regularly in front of the cans."

In addition, the space under beds can be used for storing food and water, she said. Short-term storing of water in the garage is an option, but be aware of temperatures. Heat will not hurt or crack the plastic but the cold will.

"You can also get creative by filling two 5-gallon buckets or totes with food storage items and making a TV stand with a 5 foot, 2X12 piece of wood across the buckets and a tablecloth over the top," she said. "Or make a coffee table by using three or four buckets or large totes with a cloth on top. A bedside table can be made using one bucket or tote. There are many furniture/storage possibilities if you look at your space and come up with a plan."

Washburn said to store food in a cool, dark location when possible, and to keep it out of direct sunlight and moisture.

She said the top 10 foods to include in food storage are wheat; beans, legumes and lentils; white rice; pasta; dehydrated fruits and vegetables such as raisins, apples or tomatoes; nonfat powdered milk; sugar including honey or jam; oil and/or olive oil; salt, soda and baking powder; and nuts or peanut butter.

The top 10 foods for students to store include wheat; beans (chick peas, lentils that are easy to reconstitute); pasta; rice; canned meats including tuna, sardines and chicken; jam or honey; peanut butter; dehydrated fruits and vegetables such as raisins, apples or tomatoes; nonfat dehydrated milk; and beef jerky and cheese, which only have a 6-months shelf life, but provide good nutrition and are easy to grab.

Washburn said to be sure to have a 72-hour kit for each person

and to include a solar cell phone and flashlight charger in case the power goes out.

"Besides the food and emergency kit, also be sure to store as much water as you have storage space for," she said. "Recommendations are 1 gallon per person per day."

When we become prepared for an emergency, we can reduce fear, anxiety and loses, Washburn said. Food storage preparedness can provide security and alleviate fear. Becoming better prepared strengthens families and communities.

References

extension.usu.edu

This article was written by Julene Reese