



## The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

A few years ago, USDA found that 44% of post-farm food waste happens in the home. Most of that, some 80%, is made up of perishables - fruits & vegetables, milk & dairy, breads & bakery items, as well as meat & seafood. While there definitely comes a time to let such items go, preferably to the compost heap, permanent solutions are often taken prematurely. Common misconceptions about the good, the bad, and the ugly are the most common driver, so here's a review of five of the most frequent as found by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

**Myth: Food poisoning is the result of eating old food.**  
 Food-related illnesses can almost always be tracked back to E. coli, salmonella, listeria, or other pernicious microbes. These are totally different from the generally harmless microbes that make our foods fade and eventually rot. "You could drink a glass of spoiled milk and you might get a stomachache because it tastes bad, but you're not going to get food poisoning," says [Dana Gunders](#), a senior scientist in NRDC's Food and Agriculture program. Don't force yourself to drink it, or course, but that slightly chunky milk is great for pancakes. And if milk is [past its date](#) but still smells and tastes perfectly fine, then it is perfectly fine to drink.

**Myth: Discolored or wilted greens are beyond saving.**  
 You know how leaves turn colors in the fall? The same process is at work when your arugula starts going yellow a week after you get it home from the market. The pigments that give plants their green color are chlorophyll and carotene, and chlorophyll isn't very stable. As soon as a plant is cut, it starts to break down and lose its color. That leaves only carotene, which on its own makes the plant appear yellow. This is a natural aging process and not a food-safety concern, so just cut the yellow part off. Limpness is also a natural by-product of a plant's aging, so if your greens are looking a little sad, soak them in ice water for five to ten minutes. Thanks to osmosis, water will flow into the leaf and perk it right up.

**Myth: Crisper drawers are a marketing ploy.**  
 Actually, where you put things in your refrigerator matters. Heat rises, so generally the coldest area is at the bottom and the warmest areas are the top shelf and the door. Put low-risk items like yogurt, cooked leftovers, and drinks on the top level and items that carry a higher risk of food-borne illness like uncooked meat and fish on the bottom. Nothing but condiments should be kept in the door. Crisper drawers are for produce that require an environment that's more moist than the normal refrigerator air. Use one drawer for leafy greens that need high humidity. (That added moisture will keep them fresh and green longer.) In the other drawer, store fruit, mushrooms, and peppers. If possible, keep it cracked slightly to allow ethylene gas, which is released by fruit and speeds the ripening process, to escape.

**Myth: Pretty produce is better than ugly produce.**  
 Shocking amounts of perfectly delicious produce get thrown away every year because of totally benign physical shortcomings, like a carrot with an extra stalk or an apple that isn't quite "apple-shaped." In fact, fruits and vegetables get trashed more than any other kind of food. Scars (brown lines or indentations, which develop during growth) and scabs (round, rough patches on apples and pears) have absolutely no effect on taste. Bruises are areas of increased enzyme activity usually brought on by injury and are normally safe to eat, although they can affect the taste or texture of the fruit. "Cut out the bruise, but don't throw out the whole product," Gunders says.

**Myth: "Sell by" dates indicate when a food starts to go bad.**  
 Besides being somewhat arbitrary (there's no federal regulation for those date stamps), "sell by," "use before," and "best by" dates are simply guidelines for freshness and have almost nothing to do with when a food is no longer safe to eat. Eggs, for example, are still good three to five weeks after their "sell by" date. "Eggs and dairy are the most common products that people unnecessarily throw out because they're misinterpreting the date on the packaging," Gunders says. The "sell by" dates you should pay close attention to are those on deli meats, unpasteurized cheese, and hot dogs and sausages that aren't fully cooked. These have a higher likelihood of carrying the pathogen listeria, which is unique in that it can grow under refrigeration. Otherwise, use your common sense, not the date on the label, to decide if something can be eaten. "If a product past its 'sell by' date looks and smells okay, then it probably is," Gunders says.



Shopping your fridge first is an important strategy for reducing food waste. Here's a recipe idea that will help you use what you have before buying more!

### APPLE COOKIES

*Step aside chocolate chips, there's a new cookie in town!*

**USES UP** Apples      **MAKES** 4 dozen cookies

- INGREDIENTS**
- ½ cup butter
  - 1½ cups firmly packed brown sugar
  - 1 egg
  - 2½ cups sifted all-purpose flour
  - 1 teaspoon cinnamon
  - ½ teaspoon salt
  - ½ teaspoon baking soda
  - ½ teaspoon nutmeg
  - ½ teaspoon allspice
  - ½ teaspoon cloves
  - ½ cup apple juice (pineapple juice, orange juice, or milk can be substituted)
  - 1 cup chopped, unpeeled raw apple
  - 1 cup chopped walnuts, hazelnuts, or pecans
  - 1 cup raisins

**DIRECTIONS**

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a large mixing bowl, cream the butter, then cream in the sugar. Beat in the egg.

In a separate mixing bowl, sift the dry ingredients together, then add to the creamed mixture, then add the juice and mix. Stir in the apple, nuts, and raisins.

Using two spoons (rather than your hands), scoop up a small amount of dough with one spoon and push it onto a buttered cookie sheet with the other spoon, leaving about one and a half inches between each cookie.

Bake for about 10 to 12 minutes, or until light brown. Transfer to a rack and let cool. Store in airtight containers.

**CREDIT** Recipe courtesy of the [James Beard Foundation](#).

## FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

**GREENS, HEARTY**  
**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes **AT FRESHEST:** 3 to 5 days  
**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Do not wash until ready to use. Remove twist ties and store loosely, with a damp cloth, in an airtight container in the high-humidity drawer of the refrigerator.  
**FREEZING:** Blanch, immerse in ice water, drain, dry, and then place in an airtight container.  
**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** Soak wilted greens in a bowl of ice water for 5 to 10 minutes to revive crispness. Kale stems can be blanched and made into a pesto. They can also be prepared right along with the leaves. Chard stems make a great substitute for celery, particularly in cooked preparations.

**GREENS, SALAD**  
**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes **AT FRESHEST:** 7 days; head lettuces, like iceberg, keep longer than leaf lettuces  
**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Store with a damp cloth in an airtight container in the high-humidity drawer of the refrigerator. Alternatively, place in a cup with water on the counter, as you would cut flowers. Cover bitter lettuces, such as endive, as they increase in bitterness when exposed to light.  
**FREEZING:** Not recommended.  
**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** Heads of lettuce that appear rotten can be salvaged by removing several outer leaves and cutting away any bruised parts. Packaged lettuce with a few bad pieces can be saved by removing those pieces and then soaking the rest in ice water for 5 to 10 minutes.  
 Wilted greens can be soaked in ice water 5 to 10 minutes to perk them up. Yes, lettuce can be cooked! Even older or wilted leaves and packaged mixes. If the outside leaves of a bitter lettuce are too bitter, remove them and try the inner leaves.

**HERBS, BASIL**  
**REFRIGERATE IT:** No **AT FRESHEST:** Up to 1 week  
**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Trim stem ends and stick the bunch in a tall glass of water, as you would cut flowers. Loosely cover with a plastic bag and keep on the counter, changing the water daily. It can also be stored in the refrigerator by wrapping in cloth and then placing in an airtight container on the top shelf. However, the cold is likely to brown the leaves quickly.  
**FREEZING:** Chop and cover with olive oil or blend with olive oil in a food processor or blender. Freeze in an ice-cube tray, transferring to an airtight container or zip-top freezer bag when frozen. Basil leaves can be frozen on baking sheets and then transferred, but they may blacken. Basil can also be used to make pesto and then frozen.  
**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** If wilted, trim stems, then soak in ice water 15 min. Both stems & flowers are edible.

**HERBS OTHER THAN BASIL**  
**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes **AT FRESHEST:** 1 week, depending on the herb (heartier herbs such as rosemary and thyme last longer)  
**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Store loosely wrapped in a cloth in a breathable bag in the high-humidity drawer of the refrigerator.  
**FREEZING:** For heartier herbs like rosemary, sage, thyme, and oregano, pack into ice-cube trays, filling them two-thirds full, then top the compartments with olive oil or melted butter; cover lightly and freeze, then transfer the cubes to an airtight container.  
 To freeze without oil, wash, drain, and pat dry with a cloth. Wrap a few sprigs or leaves in freezer wrap and put in an airtight container. The flavor of many herbs is well preserved by freezing (more so than by drying for many), but they may become discolored and limp.  
 Herbs can be dried in the microwave—a process that, in fact, preserves their flavor better than using ovens or dehydrators. Remove stems, place herbs between two paper towels, and microwave on High (full power) for 1 minute. If not completely dry, continue to cook and check in 20-second intervals. Stop early if you smell burning.  
**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** Place fresh herbs in a jar of olive oil and store in the refrigerator for a flavored oil (bring to room temperature before using within 4 days). Strong rosemary stems can be used as skewers for kebabs.

To download the entire Food Storage Guide, go to:  
[www.savethefood.com/food-storage](http://www.savethefood.com/food-storage)

## Quick Tricks! Brought To You By: **N** Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources NEBRASKA EXTENSION

### QUICK TRICKS

#### How to Quick and Prepare Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to Prevent Food Waste

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN Extension Educator

About 90 billion pounds of edible food goes uneaten each year in the United States, costing consumers about \$370 per person yearly. Tossed fruits (\$45) and vegetables (\$66) account for about 30% of this amount. Proper storage and preparation of fresh produce can help save money and better utilize the resources that go into producing food (land, water, energy).

*Following are some methods for prolonging the life of fresh produce.*

#### Produce Stored Outside the Refrigerator

Different fruits and vegetables require different temperature and humidity levels for proper storage. Some produce that tastes best stored at room temperature include: bananas, garlic, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and winter squash. Store these fruits and vegetables in a clean, dry, well-ventilated place, away from direct sunlight and away from areas where meat is prepared. Protect potatoes from light to avoid greening. If there is just slight greening, cut away the green portions from the skin before cooking and eating.  
 Keep bananas a couple of days longer by storing them in the refrigerator after they have reached the turned brown, degree of ripeness stored at room temperature. The outside will turn brown, but they will still be light-colored on the inside.  
 Another option is to buy bananas in varying degrees of ripeness so they don't all ripen at the same time.

For more food waste reducing tips, go to:  
[www.food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf](http://www.food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf)

ReFresh Nebraska is published by:  
 Keep Nebraska Beautiful  
 3201 Pioneers Blvd, Ste 118  
 Lincoln, NE 68502  
 Telephone: (402) 486-4562  
 Email: [info@knb.org](mailto:info@knb.org)  
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