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Exploring Food Waste Issues

Fall 2025

## Keep Good Food From Going To Waste - Take The Food Waste Challenge

*This summer, Keep Nebraska Beautiful received several inquiries regarding the Food Waste Program, and what folks can do to waste less food in their daily lives. We think EPA's Food Waste Challenge is a great place to start - so much so, that we made it the leading article of our 2nd issue back in 2018. Hard to believe it's been seven years, so thought it a perfect opportunity to renew the challenge!*

From farm to table, preventable waste occurs all along the food chain. In fact, research shows that people tend to waste far more food than they think they do, so it's important to understand how and where that occurs if habits are to change. As part of their call for a 50% reduction of food waste in America by 2030, EPA introduced the Food Waste Challenge - a six week food waste assessment designed for families, but which can easily be scaled for use in restaurants, and cafeterias of all sizes.

Only a few basic tools are needed - a pen or pencil, paper or printed work sheets (see link below), garbage bags (small if measuring by volume) and a scale, if measuring by weight. Measure preventable waste ONLY, including food that spoils in the fridge over that time. NON-EDIBLE food such as banana peels, eggshells, apple cores and chicken bones, should be discarded in the usual manner. Preferably that would mean composting, but if not yet part of your routine, we'll get there in time, so it's ok to wait until you're ready. Also, while you don't need to collect liquid waste such as soup or food-soiled paper products, any meat or veggies that can be filtered out will provide a more accurate food waste assessment.

Begin by explaining the challenge to members of your household, or kitchen and ask for their participation. Prep a new garbage bag at the start of each week - preferably by lining a paper bag with a green compostable bag, but any plastic bag will do. Over the course of the week, place all your PREVENTABLE food waste inside - including food that spoils in the fridge over that time. Add new bags as necessary. It's important that usual routines are kept as much as possible, so unless the freezer is cleaned out on a regular basis, don't do it until the challenge is over.

For the first two weeks, simply measure how much food your family wastes in a week and record the volume and/or weight, establishing a baseline (see pg2). Then in weeks 3 through 5, try out one or more of the smart strategies listed below while continuing to measure how much goes to waste each week. Keep notes on what works to reduce food waste and what doesn't. Finally in week 6, hone your strategies, measure and record your final weekly food waste amount, and compare to previous weeks to see how much food (and money) you saved.

### Food Waste Reduction Strategies:

SMART SHOPPING: Shop with Meals in Mind

- Shop your kitchen first and note items you already have.
- Buy What You Need - Make a shopping list based on remaining needs for meals you'll eat at home before your next shopping trip.
- Next to fresh items on the list, note the quantity you need or number of meals you're buying for.

SMART STORAGE: Keep Fruits and Vegetables Fresh

- Store produce for maximum freshness - know which belong inside and outside the fridge. They will taste better and last longer.

Inside the fridge:

- Apples, berries, and cherries
- Grapes, kiwi, lemons, and oranges
- Melons, nectarines, apricots, peaches, and plums (after ripening)
- Avocados, pears, tomatoes (after ripening)
- Almost all vegetables and herbs

Outside the fridge:

- Bananas, mangos, papayas, and pineapples: (in a cool place)
- Potatoes, onions: (in a cool, dark place)
- Basil and winter squashes: (once cut, store squashes in fridge)

Other storage tips:

- If you like your fruit at room temperature, take only a day's worth out at a time.
- Many fruits give off natural gases that hasten the spoilage of other produce. Store bananas, apples, and tomatoes by themselves and store fruits and vegetables in different bins.
- Consider storage bags and containers designed to help extend the life of your produce.
- To prevent mold, wash berries just before eating.

SMART PREP: Prep now, eat later

- When you get home from the store, take the time to wash, dry, chop, dice, slice, and place your fresh food items in clear storage containers for snacks and easy cooking.
- Befriend your freezer and visit it often. Freeze food such as bread, sliced fruit, or meat that you know you won't be able to eat in time.
- Cut your time in the kitchen by preparing and freezing meals ahead of time.

- Prepare and cook perishable items, then freeze them for use throughout the month. For example, bake and freeze chicken breasts or fry and freeze taco meat.

SMART SAVING: Eat what you buy

Be mindful of leftovers and old ingredients that need using up. Designate an area in the fridge for food that should be eaten soon to prevent spoiling and post an EAT FIRST prompt as a visual reminder.

For more information on sustainable management of food or to take the Food Waste Challenge, please visit [www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food](http://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food)

For more information, see the [EPA Food System Programs & Funding page](#)

[Click here for a printable Food Waste Challenge Worksheet!](#)

GET SMART: TAKE THE CHALLENGE  
KEEP GOOD FOOD FROM GOING TO WASTE

RECORDING WORKSHEET

WEEK 1

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

WEEK 2

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

TOTALS - Weeks 1 & 2

Bag Volume Weight Averages-Weeks 1 and 2: Total Volume + 2 = Total Weight + 2 =

NOTES (WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T)

WEEK 3

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

WEEK 4

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

TOTALS - Weeks 3 & 4

Bag Volume Weight Averages-Weeks 1 and 2: Total Volume + 2 = Total Weight + 2 =

NOTES (WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T)

WEEK 5

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

WEEK 6

Start Date: Day of Week: Bag Volume Weight # of days collected

NOTES (WHAT GOES TO WASTE AND WHY)

TOTALS - Weeks 5 & 6

Bag Volume Weight Averages-Weeks 1 and 2: Total Volume + 2 = Total Weight + 2 =

NOTES (WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T)

ReFresh Recipes

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!

### Cilantro Stem Green Sauce

COZY COMFORT FOOD THAT WASTES LESS AND TASTES GREAT



Chop stems up right along with the leaves to add to recipes or whip them, like in this one here. This green cilantro sauce is best when served up at cookouts, right along with whatever you're throwing on the flame.

**USES UP** Cilantro Stems **MAKES** 4 Servings

### INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar or freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup fresh cilantro stems (from 1 bunch of cilantro)
- 1/2 cup olive oil or neutral oil, such as organic canola or grapeseed
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin

### DIRECTIONS

- In a blender, mixing cup of a small food processor, or immersion blender, combine the vinegar and a pinch of salt and pepper. Swirl a few times to dissolve the salt. Add the stems, olive oil, and cumin
- Puree

- Adjust the seasoning to taste. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

From "Eat it Up!" by Sherri Brooks Vinton, Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2016

## FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

### FRUITS

#### APPLES

**REFRIGERATE IT:** Yes **AT FRESHEST:** Up to 6 weeks in the refrigerator, longer in a root cellar environment

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Do not wash until ready to use. Store in a breathable bag in the low-humidity drawer of the refrigerator. Handle carefully to prevent bruising, and separate any with bruises from other apples (or they will cause others to brown). Apples ripen 6 to 10 times faster at room temperature. For large quantities, store in a cardboard box covered with a damp towel in a root cellar or other cool place. Ideally, you would wrap each apple individually in newspaper to reduce their influence on each other. Many heirloom varieties are not suited for long-term storage, so try to eat them right away.

**FREEZING:** Can be frozen raw or cooked, with or without sugar. Raw—Wash, peel (if desired), core, and slice. To prevent browning, either blanch for 1½ to 2 minutes or sprinkle with lemon juice. Then choose between (1) packing dry with ½ cup/100 g sugar per 1 qt/1 kg of apples; (2) packing in 40 percent syrup; or (3) placing directly on a baking sheet and freezing, then transferring to an airtight container. Cooked—Cook, cool, and pack in an airtight container.

**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** To prevent apple slices from browning, toss them with one part citrus juice and three parts water. Mealy or wrinkled—Cook! Even shriveled apples can be cooked into applesauce, apple pies, apple crisps, etc. A few bruises are fine and can be cut out; if the whole fruit is soft or mushy, however, discard. Use apple peels to make a tea, flavor fresh water, make a jelly or syrup, or in smoothies.

#### AVOCADOS

**REFRIGERATE IT:** After ripe **AT FRESHEST:** Whole, after ripe, 2 to 5 days in refrigerator

**OPTIMAL STORAGE:** Store on the counter until ripe, then refrigerate loose. Place in a closed paper bag to accelerate ripening (adding an apple or banana will make them ripen even faster). Do not refrigerate before ripe, or they will never ripen. Store avocado-based products such as guacamole with plastic wrap pressed directly onto the surface of the food to avoid browning.

**FREEZING:** Peel, puree, mix in 1 Tbsp lemon juice per avocado, and pack into an airtight container, leaving 1/2 in/ 12 mm at the top for expansion.

**USE IT UP/REVIVAL:** If you find that an avocado is not ripe enough after you've cut it open, sprinkle the surface with lemon or lime juice, close it back up around the pit, wrap tightly, and place in the refrigerator. Check periodically to see if it has ripened enough to eat. To prevent browning once cut, close the avocado back up around the pit or sprinkle with lemon or lime juice and place in an airtight container in the refrigerator. If your avocado or guacamole has turned brown, skim off the brown parts. Parts that are green are still edible (so are the brown parts, but they may not taste as good)

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: Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources

## NEBRASKA EXTENSION

### QUICK TRICKS

Food tossed is money lost. One way to add new life to still edible foods is to re-purpose leftovers and reuse them in new ways and new recipes. This booklet will get you started with simple tips and recipes.

You'll find "recycled" can taste just as good, maybe even better than the original recipe.

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN Extension Educator

Fruits

1. Freeze lemon or lime juice in ice cube trays. Transfer to freezer bags. Pop into water for flavored water. NOTE: It's easier to remove frozen food from silicone ice cube trays and muffin pans than plastic trays or metal pans as silicon is more flexible.

2. Roll citrus fruits with your hand on a hard surface before juicing to get more juice from them.

3. Refrigerate ripe bananas to make them last a few days longer. They may be brown on outside, but still a good color on the inside.

4. Freeze lemon slices in water in cupcake pans for large, flavored ice cubes.

5. Freeze washed, peeled, bite-size pieces of fruit for smoothies. Place on baking sheet with sides and cover with plastic wrap. Transfer frozen pieces to freezer bags. Toss into smoothies.

For more 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)



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