

FDA FACT SHEET

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Tips to Reduce Food Waste

We can all play a part in reaching the national food waste reduction goal – to reduce food waste by 50% by the year 2030. Start using these tips today to reduce food waste, save money, and protect the environment.

At the grocery store or when eating out

- Preplan and write your shopping list before going to the grocery store. As you write your list, think about what meals you will be preparing the following week, and check your fridge to see what items you already have.
- When at the store, buy only what you need and stick to your shopping list. Be careful when buying in bulk, especially with items that have a limited shelf life.
- If available, purchase “ugly” fruits or vegetables that often get left behind at the grocery store but are safe to eat. “Ugly” produce has physical imperfections but are not damaged or rotten. “Ugly” fruits and vegetables are safe and nutritious and can sometimes be found at discounted prices.
- When eating out, ask for smaller portions to prevent plate waste and keep you from overeating. You can also request a take-away box to take leftovers home instead of leaving food on your plate.



In the kitchen – storage and prep

- Check the temperature setting of your fridge. Keep the temperature at 40° F or below to keep foods safe. The temperature of your freezer should be 0° F.
- Use the FoodKeeper App (<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp/>) for information on how to safely store different foods to maintain freshness and quality.
- Refrigerate peeled or cut veggies for freshness and to keep them from going bad.
- Use your freezer! Freezing is a great way to store most foods to keep them from going bad until you are ready to eat them. Check the FoodKeeper App (<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/foodkeeperapp/>) for information on how long different items can be stored in the freezer.
- Create a designated space in your fridge for foods that you think will be going bad within a few days.
- Check your fridge often to keep track of what you have and what needs to be used. Eat or freeze items before you need to throw them away.
- If you have more food on hand than you can use or you need, consider donating your extra supply of packaged foods to a local food pantry or a food drive.
- Learn about food product dating – Many consumers misunderstand the purpose and meaning of the date labels that often appear on packaged foods. Confusion over date labeling accounts for an estimated 20 percent of consumer food waste.
 - Except for infant formula, manufacturers are not required by Federal law or regulation to place quality-based date labels on packaged food.

- There are no uniform or universally accepted descriptions used on food labels for open dating (calendar dates) in the United States. As a result, there are a wide variety of phrases used for product dating.
- FDA supports efforts by the food industry to make “**Best if Used By**” the standard phrase to indicate the date when a product will be at its best flavor and quality. Consumers should examine foods for signs of spoilage that are past their “Best if used by” date. If the products have changed noticeably in color, consistency or texture, consumers may want to avoid eating them. If you have questions or concerns about the quality, safety and labeling of the packaged foods you buy, you are encouraged to reach out to the company that produced the product. Many packaged foods provide the company’s contact information on the package.
- Manufacturers apply date labels at their own discretion and for a variety of reasons. The most common is to inform consumers and retailers of the date to which they can expect the food to retain its desired quality and flavor.
- Industry is moving toward more uniform practices for date labeling of packaged foods. But, for now, consumers may see different phrases used for product dating, such as Sell By, Best By, Expires on, etc.

At home – cooking, serving, and enjoying food with family and friends

- Use “ugly” fruits or vegetables to whip up healthy smoothies and soups for your friends or family. No one will notice the difference!
- Be creative and have fun! Create new dishes and snacks with leftovers or items you think will go bad if not eaten soon. Have a cook off to find out who can come up with the best dish.
- Follow the 2-Hour Rule. For safety reasons, don’t leave perishables out at room temperature for more than two hours, unless you’re keeping it hot or cold. If the temperature is above 90° F, food shouldn’t be left out for more than one hour. Also, remember to refrigerate leftovers within two hours.
- Use serving size information on the Nutrition Facts label to help you portion meals or snacks. You can always add more to your plate after finishing off the first helping.
- Prepared too much food for a party at your home? Pack extras in containers for guests to take home or take some over to a neighbor as a nice gesture.
- Have a friendly competition with your friends or family members to see who can go the longest without any food waste.



For more information:

- [Food Waste Food Facts](#)

The FDA, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, protects the public health by assuring the safety, effectiveness, and security of human and veterinary drugs, vaccines and other biological products for human use, and medical devices. The agency also is responsible for the safety and security of our nation’s food supply, cosmetics, dietary supplements, and products that give off electronic radiation, and for regulating tobacco products.

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