

REDUCING FOOD WASTE

If you work in an office, you may have to clean out the break-room refrigerator on occasion. The person who draws the short-straw to take on the task (or who just does it out of the goodness of their heart), may end up filling up half a garbage can of food waste: the dip from the Christmas party, expired yogurt and kefir, a moldy block of cheese, leftovers shoved to the back of the shelf that are now looking like a science experiment gone bad. That food, and all its packaging is dumped – en masse – into the trash can. Then it goes to the landfill where it is buried and left to rot, producing methane gas in the process.

It is estimated that 40% of food waste in America occurs in supermarkets and by consumers. In addition to generating greenhouse gases when the food rots in a landfill, food waste is also a tremendous expense of energy. The energy and resources required to grow, prepare, package, ship, purchase and refrigerate food is all wasted when the food itself goes uneaten. So one way consumers can make a measurable difference in greenhouse gas emissions is to reduce food waste and when possible, compost the scraps. Cutting down on food waste “represents one of the greatest possibilities for individuals, companies and communities to contribute to reversing global warming and at the same time feed more people, increase economic benefits and preserve threatened ecosystems.” (Washington Post article by Chad Frischmann, 7/31/18).

Everyone can reduce food waste by not over-buying, and by using everything you buy before it spoils. Some suggestions for reducing food waste include:

1. Growing a garden to feed yourself. This can help you become more aware of what and how much you buy at the grocery store.
2. Eat in-season produce. It's fresher and lasts longer.
3. When shopping, only get what you are sure you can finish eating.
4. Don't overcook – make just what you know you can eat before getting tired of the dish. Reduce your portion sizes and finish all that is on the plate.
5. Freeze leftover food in portion sizes that are easy to reheat and finish.
6. Pack your own lunches – use leftovers for lunch and save food and money.
7. Store food correctly to maximize its lifespan. Query the Internet if you do not know the proper way to store certain fruits and vegetables.
8. Dig through the refrigerator on a regular basis, to find the forgotten dishes that get pushed to the back.
9. Expiration dates/sell by dates are guidelines, rather than gospel. These dates most often represent a point at which the product declines in quality, not safety.
10. Donate excess food to a Food Bank before it goes bad.
11. Start a compost pile for your food scraps, but don't use it as an excuse to not follow the previous suggestions.

