



Waste Not, Want Not: A Gentle Reminder this Holiday Season to Consider your Food Use and Waste

'Tis the season for holiday parties and festive gatherings, when food is often a focal point, served in abundance beyond what is eaten, with plenty left over. Those leftovers may be eaten, or may be found in the fridge three, four, five days later, untouched and questionable; then eventually thrown away because they have passed their prime or to make room for yet more leftovers. We have all been there, clearing out the fridge, tossing old food into the trash. In fact, food waste is a persistent problem in many households in America. American families waste approximately 25% of food and beverages they buy. Collectively, households are responsible for the largest portion of total food waste at 43% of all food waste. Food waste has negative impacts on our environment, economy, and food security, affecting everyone in some way, whether directly or indirectly.

While we might think of being mindful of what and how much we eat during the holiday season, it is also important that we be mindful and intentional about food purchases and uses to help avoid unnecessary waste. So, consider these steps, not only this holiday season but all year through to help reduce your household food waste:

1. Buy only that which you know you will prepare and eat before it spoils. Write down a menu in advance, check what you already have in your fridge and pantry, and make a grocery list with just enough for each menu item.

2. Prepare just enough, unless you have planned intentions of eating the leftovers. If preparing for a group or a party, consider a reasonable portion per person. Avoid preparing extra “just in case.” Instead, have a can of lightly salted nuts or dried fruits, which store well if not eaten, as an additional snack for guests.
3. If you do have leftovers, eat them before they spoil.
 - Make leftover dinner your lunch the next day.
 - Think *ingredients* not *leftovers*. For example:
 - Add leftover grains or veggies to soups
 - Scramble leftover meats or veggies with an egg for breakfast
 - Leftover bread? Make breadcrumbs or croutons. Leftover bread is also great topped with tomatoes and shredded cheese then heated under the broiler.
 - Make a kitchen sink meal. Toss leftover meats, veggies, fruits, grains, and/or cheeses with copped romaine lettuce and add a dressing to make a salad. Or, prepare a taco bowl with leftovers and top with choice of salsa, sour cream, plain yogurt, shredded cheese, or whatever you have in the fridge.
 - Leftover pasta goes great in a frittata.
 - Any leftover meats, veggies, or spreads can be stuffed in a pita or in between two pieces of bread for a quick sandwich.
4. For those leftovers you will not eat right away, freeze them for later. Portioning them into individual containers before freezing is convenient for lunches or dinners.
5. Understand food product dates. Manufacturers use food dates to ensure that consumers buy or use the food product at its best quality.
 - A *sell by* date is the date an item should be sold by to ensure best quality.
 - A *best by* or *use by* date is a date that makers determine will be the length of time the product will be at its best.

These dates are *quality* dates, *not safety* dates. When stored properly, most food products should be safe to eat after the use by or best by date.

WARNING: If food is obviously spoiled – it’s abnormally soft, discolored, moldy, or has a strong unpleasant smell – discard it, no matter how properly or how short a time it has been stored.

As the old proverb says – waste not, want not. If you do not waste the resources you have now, then you will have those resources you need in the future.

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