

FOOD STORAGE

Much of household food waste is generated because we buy too much, let it spoil or put more on our plates than what we can eat. About two-thirds of food waste is due to food spoiling because it is not used in time, whereas the other one-third is caused by people cooking or serving too much. Certain types of food, such as produce, tend to get thrown away because it spoils before it can be used. Learning how to properly store food can significantly reduce food waste.

Outcome

Participants will learn how to store, refrigerate and freeze food to reduce food waste.

Audience

Adults

Time

30 - 45 minutes

Concepts

- Properly storing food can make it last longer and reduce food waste.
- Wasting food is costly for your wallet and the environment. It takes energy, water and other natural resources to produce food and to dispose of food waste.

Supplies

- Eureka Recycling's online A to Z Food Storage Guide available in the Appendix
- Examples of food items, including fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy, dry goods and spices
- Storage supplies including paper towels, cloth towel, glass jar, plastic bag, airtight container, kitchen knife, wax paper, grater
- Thermometers for people to check the temperature of their refrigerators (*optional*)



FOOD STORAGE

Preparation

- Read Eureka Recycling's online A to Z Food Storage Guide and review the Natural Resources Defense Council's The Refrigerator Demystified infographic to familiarize yourself with the material before you present it to participants.
- Print copies of Eureka Recycling's online A to Z Food Storage Guide for participants
- Acquire examples of food items.

Procedure

- Distribute Eureka Recycling's online A to Z Food Storage Guide and display or distribute copies of the Refrigerator Demystified infographic.
- Review the following food waste storage tips with participants.
 - Set your refrigerator to the right temperature. Food needs to be stored between 33 - 41 degrees Fahrenheit for maximum freshness and longevity. Check that the seals on your fridge are good as well. Make sure to store foods in the correct place in the refrigerator for maximum freshness.
 - Place food in appropriate packaging (example: store mushrooms in something breathable, like a paper bag, instead of plastic). Find alternative uses for produce that is past its peak quality. For example, vegetables that are starting to wilt can be used to make soup.
 - Learn the best place to store food. For example, many fruits should be stored in the fridge because they last longer in cooler temperatures.
 - Properly store your food immediately after buying items to ensure your food will last as long as possible.
 - Freeze food if you can't eat it in time. Many fruits freeze well, such as strawberries, blueberries, and bananas, and can then be used for smoothies or baking. Visit www.usda.gov and search "freezing food" to see how long certain foods last in the freezer.
- Ask participants what types of food are often wasted in their homes and search for storage tips on Eureka Recycling's A to Z Food Storage Guide.
- Show participants examples of food storage items and which foods could be stored in them to maximize the shelf life.
- Have each participant chose one to three storage tips to try at home. Have participants commit to their storage tips by writing which storage tips they will try on a sticky note and display the sticky notes for all participant to see.
- If possible, give participants a few weeks to try out the food storage techniques. Discuss the changes participants have made, sharing both successes and challenges they continue to encounter.

Discussion questions

- What specific food items do you have questions about storing properly? Give an example of one item, such as an apple, for which you learned the proper storage technique.
- What foods do you buy most often?
- What foods do you often find yourself throwing away?
- How often do you shop for food? Do you plan meals before you go to the grocery store? Do you find it helps you waste less food? What are other benefits to meal planning?
- What is your most common reason for throwing out food?
- What do you want to learn more about?

FOOD STORAGE

Additional activity ideas

- **Take inventory**
Take inventory of your refrigerator, freezer and cupboards to see what foods you have. Keep a list of the contents of each to remind yourself to use them up before buying more or before they spoil or become stale.
- **Donate food**
If you have non-perishable and unspoiled perishable food that you don't want or don't think you'll use, donate it to local food banks, soup kitchens, pantries, and shelters.
- **Leftover potluck**
Have a potluck dinner in which only leftovers are served. Foods such as chili, stew and soups can taste better as leftovers because the flavors have had time to meld.

Resources

The Natural Resources Defense Council's "the Refrigerator Demystified" infographic in the Appendix.