

TRACK YOUR FOOD WASTE AT HOME

More than 20 percent of the food we buy gets thrown away. That adds up to about 245 pounds per person each year! And food waste is a large proportion of our trash. An average household throws away one pound of food waste for every seven pounds of trash. The average American family of four ends up throwing away an equivalent of up to \$1,500 annually in food. In this activity, participants will calculate food waste by measuring and tracking all the food thrown away over a week or longer.

Outcome

Participants will increase their awareness of how much food waste they produce each week by measuring their food waste.

Audience

Youth (ages 8+), adults

Time

60 minutes for the initial set-up, then 1 to 2 weeks for the measurement exercise

Concepts

- Measure and record the amount food wasted each week
- Increase awareness about food waste

Supplies

- Paper lunch bags
- Tape or stapler
- The Food Waste Challenge measurement tool from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), available in the Appendix. Try to get participants to reuse the label for subsequent measurement weeks by removing the label from the paper bag after each week and reattaching it to a new bag, but be prepared to provide a few extras.
- The Food Waste Challenge worksheet from the U.S. EPA, available in the Appendix.
- BPI-certified compostable bags (*optional*)



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Preparation

- Gather a supply of paper lunch bags, one or two for each week that you want participants to measure their food waste.
- Print out copies of the Food Waste Challenge measurement tool. Decide how long you want participants to measure their food waste.

Procedure

- Tape or staple the Food Waste Challenge measurement labels on the paper bags.
- At the start of each week, line one paper lunch bag with a BPI-certified compostable bag. Over the course of the week, place all your preventable food waste into the bag. Preventable food waste is food you bought to eat but has since spoiled or food that was prepared but was not eaten. Discard non-edible food waste such as banana peels, egg shells and chicken bones in the usual manner.
- At the end of each week, measure the volume of food waste in the bag using the fractions on the printed label. Record the volume on the Food Waste Challenge worksheet. If you have a kitchen scale at home, you may use that to weigh the food waste for a more accurate measurement.
- If the bag fills up before the end of the week, weigh or record the volume of the full bag and record how many days you collected food in that bag. Then begin collecting in a new bag. At the end of the week, total the weight and/or volume of food waste for the entire week.
- After recording the volume of food wasted for the week, place the collection bag and food in a curbside organics cart (if available) or backyard compost bin (as long as the food waste is only fruit and vegetable scraps), bring it to the Hennepin County Drop-off facility in Brooklyn Park or put it in your garbage.
- Have participants report and share the amount of food waste generated. If you are working with a group, consider charting or otherwise displaying and sharing the group's results. Discuss changes participants are motivated to take after measuring their food waste. Consider doing the activity again in a few months to see if participants have made any lasting changes.
- Waste collection tips:
 - If you are concerned about leakage, use a plastic bag as a second liner.
 - If you are concerned about odor, you can clip the top of the bag shut, or you can start using a new bag midweek as long as you track the total volume of waste for the whole week. You can also store the bag in the fridge.
 - Do not collect liquid waste such as soup.

Discussion questions

- What did you learn that was new? Was there anything that surprised you?
- Did you find the exercise helpful or informative, and how?
- Can you think of ways to reduce how much food you are throwing in the trash based on what you threw out?
- Do you think you often buy more food than needed?
- What are the most common food items that get thrown away in your household?
- What do you want to learn more about?

Additional activity ideas

Research the life cycle of food

Research the life cycle of a food or food product. What goes into getting your chosen food item from farm to your table?

Continue to measure food waste

Continue the food-waste measurement exercise for six weeks. The first two weeks are spent measuring

how much food waste your household throws away, and the third through sixth weeks are spent testing strategies from the U.S. EPA to prevent food waste while continuing to measure how much is being thrown away. View the U.S. EPA's "Food: Too Good to Waste" Implementation Guide and Toolkit at www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-too-good-waste-implementation-guide-and-toolkit.