

EAT FIRST

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, food waste accounted for almost 14 percent of municipal solid waste in the United States in 2010 – that’s 34 million tons of food waste! Food is wasted for many reasons, including buying too much, poor planning and spoilage. This activity aims to help reduce the amount of food wasted in households by helping participants prioritize what food needs to be eaten first.

Outcome

Participants will create an “Eat First” sign to label a box, container or area of their refrigerator as a visual reminder that certain foods need to be eaten sooner to prevent them from spoiling and going to waste.

Audience

Youth (ages 8+), adults

Time

30 - 50 minutes

Concepts

- Food gets wasted when it’s forgotten about in the back of the fridge.
- Use up perishable foods before they spoil to avoid wasting money and resources that went into growing and producing the food.
- Make your perishable foods more visible by designating a specially labeled place for them in your fridge.

Supplies

- Shoe box or shoe box-sized plastic container for each participant
- Large, flat pieces of paper
- Scissors
- Glue stick or tape
- Markers or crayons
- Paints, fabric scraps, buttons, etc. for decorating the box (*optional*)
- A computer and printer if participants want to design a sign (*optional*)



EAT ME FIRST

Preparation

Gather the containers and materials for decorating the containers in advance. Provide a shoe box or other shoe

box-shaped container for each person, or have each participant bring one.

Procedure

- Explain to participants that they will be creating an “Eat First” container to keep in the refrigerator that will hold food that is close to its expiration date and should be consumed before it goes bad or is wasted.
- Have each participant use the paper and writing utensils to make a sign that says, “Eat First.” The signs can be as creative or decorative as they wish, but the wording should remain clear. Make sure the signs are the right size for the shoe boxes or containers.
- Have participants tape or glue the “Eat First” sign on the shoe box or container and ask each participant to specify where in their refrigerator makes sense to put this container.
- Have participants identify perishable food that should go in the “Eat First” container, and place the container in the refrigerator.

Discussion questions

- What types of foods will you put into your “Eat First” box?
- What are other ways you can try to help foods get eaten? (Example: rotate food forward with older food in front and new food in back)
- What are some other ideas for better storing food? (Example: place items on Lazy Susans in the fridge so food can be found and used easily)
- What are other ways you can reduce the amount of food you waste?
- How does reducing food waste help the environment?

Additional activity ideas

- **Create “Eat First” stickers**
Buy blank stickers and write or print “Eat First” on each sticker. Place stickers on individual food items in the fridge so people know which items to use up first.
- **Cooking challenge**
Choose five ingredients that you already have in your fridge, freezer or cupboards. Look online to find a recipe or brainstorm to create a recipe that incorporates those five ingredients. Prepare a dish, and then share it with other participants, who will rate each other’s creations to choose a winner of the cooking challenge.
- **Pack a Low-Waste Lunch**
Many parents pack lunch items in single-use plastic bags, or they purchase single-serving items that come in their own disposable package. These products are extremely convenient, but create a lot of waste. You can pack a no-waste lunch by using a reusable lunch bag, putting sandwiches and other main dishes as well as fruits and vegetables in reusable containers, and using a reusable beverage bottle, utensils and cloth napkin. You’ll be reducing packaging waste and saving money, too.
- **Tour a commercial composting facility**
Tour a commercial composting facility to see what happens to food waste. The Mulch Store is a commercial composting facility that offer tours to the public. Learn more at www.hennepin.us/environmentaleducation.

Resources

- Eureka Recycling’s online A to Z Food Storage Guide available in the Appendix.