

Kitchen



Kitchens are the heart and soul of many homes, so it makes sense that a lot of the waste generated in a household comes from this central hub. There are many adjustments you can make to your habits that will reduce waste. You may change your routine before you get to the grocery store, change where or how you shop entirely, add a few extra recipes to your toolbox, or even tweak your go-to foods to make a happier and healthier low-waste kitchen.

Reduce packaging

Avoid excess packaging of your food by ditching single-serve portions for snacks and meals and instead buying the big box or bag and re-packing your food into your own reusable containers. You will find this saves you money, too! One example: instead of buying single-serve baby carrots for lunches, buy a large bag of carrots, slice into sticks and pack in containers. Remember to compost the peels and reuse the produce bag or add it to your plastic film recycling. You can also reduce waste further by buying unbagged carrots, using a reusable produce bag, and leaving the skins on rather than peeling them.

Remember your reusable bags



Remember to pack everything up in reusable grocery bags. If you need an extra reminder, you can get a window cling to put on your car window, door, or whatever location is closest to where you store your bags.

"One of the simplest things many people can do, but one of the hardest habits to start, is to bring your own bag. Many of us function on autopilot, and this includes going to the grocery store. I would try my best to leave my bags where I could find them before I went to the store – on the counter, on the doorknob, in my trunk, and I would almost always walk right past them! I started putting my reusable bags in the front seat of my car with me so I would have no excuse to forget them. Now after doing this for about 6 months, I've been able to remember my bags much better, but it takes a long time to start any new habit despite best intentions!" - student

Packing lunches

A lot of pre-packaged or convenience food comes in non-recyclable and non-compostable wrapping. To reduce waste, pack your own lunch from food you made. Remember that reusable lunch bags, utensils, and napkins are not just for the kids, but should be used by all family members. If you need an extra set of dishware or utensils, check your local thrift store for options.



Pictured: Reusable sandwich and snack bags and reusable sealing bowls.

Instead of buying new, you may be able to reuse packaging from foods that you bought or storage containers you already have.



Buy in bulk

Reduce food packaging even more by shopping in the bulk section of the grocery store and using your own produce bags and containers at farmers markets, co-ops or natural food stores (Check out the Minnesota Grown Directory at <http://minnesotagrown.com/member-directory/> for a farmers market listing). Ask your grocery store before using your own containers if they have a bulk bin section as some check-out aisles cannot remove the container weight, or “tare” weight, from your purchase.

If you find that your store cannot weigh outside bags or containers, you can always use a lightweight reusable bag instead of plastic produce bags, and use any reusable bag or container when items are sold by count instead of by weight. Check the price signs to find out how you’ll pay. Examples by count: “\$0.79 each,” or “2 for \$4”

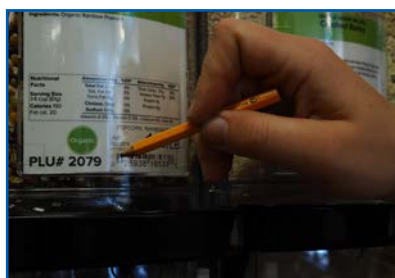
“Bulk packaged” vs. “bulk loose”

Large wholesale club stores like Costco and Sam’s Club offer foods in bulk quantities, but this doesn’t always mean you are preventing waste. Many items are still individually packaged within a larger box or bag. Ask yourself if the packaging is reducing waste, and remember to only buy an amount of food your family can consume before it spoils. It can be tempting to buy a large amount of produce at a good price, but if it goes bad, you negate the benefits both to you and to the environment. Regular grocery stores and co-ops have “loose” bulk goods, where you usually scoop or pour the product directly into your own container or a provided bag. These options can be very helpful when trying to reduce waste because you can avoid packaging almost entirely.

How to buy in bulk

You may be intimidated by the long lines of bins filled with nuts, grains and flours at your store, but buying in bulk is usually an easy and economical way to buy your food and avoid waste at the same time.

1. Choose the item you want to purchase.
2. If you can use your own container, find the TARE weight by weighing your empty container and writing down its weight. The grocery store can then subtract the weight of the container when charging for your food or product.
3. Fill up your container or bag with the food or product.
4. Make sure to write down the product number, listed as PLU, from the bulk container onto your individual container.



Reduce wasted food

Another one of the most easily avoidable sources of waste in the kitchen is food. There are many steps you can take to reduce food waste.

Eat the food you buy



Start reducing food waste by eating the food you buy. Keep track of the freshness of your ingredients, and check the cupboards and refrigerator before buying more. Look up recipes based on whatever you need to use up first. It is helpful

to create a designated spot for "eat first" foods in your refrigerator or pantry to help other family members notice, too. And don't forget to eat or freeze leftovers or items about to spoil that you don't have time to get to.

Practice meal planning

A good way to make life simpler and meal prep quicker is to put together meals in batches. Meal planning involves preparing for meals and snacks in advance. You can create individual or family sized portions of fresh or frozen foods, often for the week ahead. When you plan meals, you can go to the grocery store with a list to buy exactly what you need and no more.

Make your shopping list based on how many meals you'll eat at home. Then look in the refrigerator and cupboards first to avoid buying food you already have. Make a list each week of what needs to be used up and plan upcoming meals around that. Remember that casseroles, stir-fries, frittatas, soups, and smoothies are great ways to use leftovers. Search for websites that provide suggestions for using leftover ingredients. Many apps and websites exist to help you get started (e.g. savethefood.com/tips/10-easy-tips-for-meal-planning)



The U.S. EPA has a food waste reduction toolkit with printable worksheets available at epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/food-too-good-waste-implementation-guide-and-toolkit. The toolkit contains the following worksheets to help you buy, store and prep foods:

- Smart Shopping: Shop with Meals in Mind
- Smart Prep: Prep Now, Eat Later
- Smart Storage: Fruits and Vegetables Storage Tips

Understand food labels

There is no universally accepted system for dating food in the U.S. The only federally regulated food labeling is on baby formula to ensure that the nutrient levels listed on the packaging are accurate until the expiration date. The dates on food labels are generally not expiration dates but merely suggestions as to when the product is at its freshest. Learning the meaning of food labels can ensure you don't throw out food that is still safe to eat.

- "Use by" - products with this label should be consumed by the date listed on the package.
- "Best if used by" describes product quality. After that date, the product may not be at peak flavor but is generally safe to consume.



Use your sense of smell, sight and judgment to determine when food has gone bad. Don't use foods that have developed an off odor, flavor or appearance.

Properly store your food

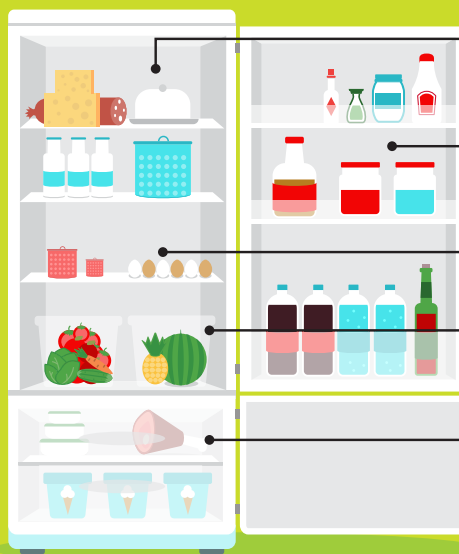
Did you know that where you put food in your refrigerator can contribute to how long it lasts? Make sure you follow some basic guidelines about where to store foods based on the average temperatures in your fridge:

- **Doors:** This is the warmest place in the fridge. Store mayo, orange juice, and other foods that need less refrigeration.
- **Top shelf:** This area has the most consistent temperature in the fridge. Store cheese, butter, and cooked meats here.
- **Bottom shelf:** This is the coldest part of the fridge. Store eggs, milk, and raw meat here.

Other food storage tips:

- Keep the fridge temperature at 40 degrees or colder. Bacteria do not like the cold.
- Store fruits and vegetables separately from each other as fruits emit natural gases that accelerate ripening and can make other nearby produce spoil faster.
- Wait to wash berries until you want to eat them to prevent mold.
- Freeze food such as bread, sliced fruit, or meat that you know you won't be able to eat in time.
- Don't keep perishable food, such as bread or wine, on top of the fridge. The fridge gives off heat that can make foods spoil faster.
- Prepare and cook perishable items then freeze them for use throughout the month. For example, bake and freeze chicken breasts or fry and freeze taco meat.

Refrigerator insider: help your refrigerator save food



Top shelf: This area has the most consistent temperature in the fridge. Store cheese, butter, and cooked meats here.

Door: The warmest space in the fridge. Good for condiments, but **not** good for perishables (like milk and eggs)

Bottom shelf: The coldest part of the fridge. Store eggs, milk, and raw meat here.

Crisper drawers: Can help control humidity levels for better storage (e.g., high humidity for lettuce, low humidity for fruits and veggies).

Freezer: Prepare and freeze items for use throughout the month. Freeze foods you won't be able to eat in time, such as bread, sliced fruit, or meat.

To refrigerate, or not to refrigerate?

Yes

Apples, berries, cherries, grapes, kiwi, lemons, oranges

Most vegetables

Fresh herbs, wrapped in a damp towel or in a container

Yes, but...leave out at room temperature until ripe and then refrigerate:

Melons, nectarines, apricots, peaches, plums, avocados, pears, tomatoes

Not necessary – these store well outside of the refrigerator, in a cool, dry place (unless cut up):

Bananas, mangos, papayas, and pineapples

Potatoes, onions (keep in a dark place)

Winter squash

To find more information about proper storage to make your food last its longest, check out savethefood.com/food-storage.

Replace disposables with reusables

In order to reduce waste, try to get rid of some or all of the disposable products you use in the kitchen. These products may feel convenient, but don't forget the time and money you use to constantly replace and dispose of these items! Which of these common products do you use, and which can you replace?

- **Paper coffee cups:** Paper coffee cups usually have a plastic coating that makes them unacceptable for organics recycling, and the #6 plastic lid isn't great for recycling, either, because it's a low-value plastic. Remember to bring a reusable coffee mug when you get takeout coffee (some places even give you a discount!).
- **Paper towels and synthetic sponges:** Trade in for an old fashioned cloth rag and a scrubber brush or scraper. These are more durable and can be washed instead of thrown out.
- **Plastic baggies:** Use reusable containers or cloth snack bags instead.
- **Plastic grocery bags:** Instead of going through countless bags each month and worrying about where to store and take them for recycling, keep a few reusable bags near the door or in your car so you always have what you need even if you didn't plan to stop.
- **Plastic produce and bulk food bags:** Don't forget that these can be replaced as well! If your grocery store accepts tare weights, you can use any container for your produce and bulk goods. Just remember to write down the weight before using them. If your store does not have the capability to separate these weights, use your own bag on items sold by count (for example: if limes are \$.50 each). You can also use a lightweight bag for other purchases sold by weight if you don't mind paying a little bit extra to avoid waste.
- **Plastic wrap:** Use reusable containers with lids for storing foods, place a plate over a bowl in the refrigerator or try an option like beeswax cloth to wrap over the top of your containers. A few common brands are Bee's Wrap and Abeego. Or you can try making your own (search the web for a tutorial).
- **Single use coffee pods:** Single serve coffee makers such as Keurigs create a lot of waste with no recycling option. You can pull apart the little cup and compost the grounds, but no area recyclers accept the plastic or foil lid. If you already have a machine, try reusable pods, which are now widely available in stores and online.

Dining on the go

When you do eat out, choose sit-down restaurants that are more likely to serve their food on reusable dishes. It is also handy to bring your own containers for leftovers to avoid taking unwanted packaging waste home with you.

As an extra trash-reducing step, choose to eat at restaurants that you know recycle and compost their waste. Hennepin County has a map of Environmental Partners who have been recognized by the county for handling their waste responsibly. View the map at hennepin.us/environmentalpartners.

If you drive often or are planning a road trip, pack snacks and meals so you don't have to stop for fast food or at gas stations as these places have a lot of processed foods in non-recyclable packaging. You can even keep some easy-to-store, long-lasting snacks like nuts, granola or dried fruit in your car as a backup for when hunger hits unexpectedly.

Make your own

See the recipe section to learn how to make the following waste-reducing products:

- Pizza dough (eliminate frozen pizza boxes or cardboard takeout boxes)
- Yogurt (reduce plastic packaging)
- Mustard (reduce or eliminate plastic squeeze bottles)
- Stovetop popcorn (eliminate potentially harmful and non-recyclable microwave popcorn bags)
- Infused water and herbal teas (reduce or eliminate plastic bottles or tea bags and paper or plastic packaging)
- Kitchen cleaners (reduce or eliminate hazardous chemicals and plastic packaging)

"When I'm going out to eat, I know ahead of time that I will only eat half my meal. I've been working on getting in the habit of bringing my own container for leftovers. I get frustrated at times because I don't like carrying more things into a restaurant. However, whenever I've managed to bring my own container, I hear positive comments from strangers. Many people really appreciate the idea of using your own container instead of making extra waste by taking a to-go container. It's worth it to keep trying."

- Master recycler/composter