

# DON'T WASTE FOOD SC

PREVENT • DONATE • COMPOST

## A Guide for Reducing Food Waste at Home



Provided by DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction & Recycling  
[www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc](http://www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc)





# How much food are you wasting at home?

Food is the No.1 item we throw away – accounting for **more than 20 percent** of the nation’s annual waste stream. Each year anywhere from **40 percent to nearly half** of the food supply in the United States is discarded – an annual loss of an estimated **\$218 billion**. All of this while more than **41 million** Americans are food insecure.

**Most food waste is created at home.** Each of us tosses about 20 pounds of food per month. A family of four, on average, spends **\$1,800 per year** on food they don’t eat.

Households are responsible for about 43 percent of all food waste in the United States – more than restaurants, grocery stores or any other part of the food chain. The reasons for this include:

- **Poor planning;**
- **Buying too much;**
- **Inability to consume food in a timely manner;**
- **Improper storage;**
- **Misunderstanding date labels;** and
- **Lack of awareness and indifference.**

This guide provides practical advice to address all of these issues and help you waste less food and save money.



## Too Good to Waste

The benefits of reducing food waste are many.

- **Feed people, not landfills.** One in eight Americans struggles with hunger including nearly 700,000 South Carolinians. Donation is a great way to support your community and provide safe, wholesome food to those in need.
- **Give yourself a raise.** On average, a family of four throws away more than \$34 of food per week. Save money using the smart strategies provided in this guide.
- **Conserve resources.** All of the labor, energy, water, fertilizer and cropland used to produce, package and transport food from farm to plate are lost if the food is not eaten.

# Smart Planning & Shopping:

## Food waste prevention begins with you.



### Plan Smart

- **Shop the refrigerator, cupboards and pantry** to avoid buying food you have.
- **Plan your meals for the week based on items you already have.** Buy only what you need for those meals.
- **Make a shopping list based on your plan.** A printable blank shopping list is available on the Don't Waste Food SC website.
- **Include quantities on your list.** Consider how many meals you will make with each item (e.g., salad greens – enough for two lunches).
- **Understand the date labels.** Learn what “sell by,” “use by” and “best by” mean before tossing anything. See page 4.
- **Track what you buy and throw away.** Chances are you will notice some trends – and adjust your buying habits.
- **Use food apps.** There are apps that provide information on proper refrigerator storage, freezer tips, locating food banks, recipes for leftovers and more. Check out the food apps on page 7.



### Shop Smart

- **Buy only what you need.** Food waste starts with what we put in our grocery carts.
- **Stick to your list.** Shoppers who use lists have lower grocery bills.
- **Select perishable foods last.** If you won't be home soon, keep a cooler in your car.
- **Buy local.** Farmers markets provide local, in-season produce that lasts longer than produce that was shipped a long way.
- **Shop more often.** One of the top items thrown away is produce. If you do one large shopping trip per week, try supplementing it with a couple of small trips to restock produce.
- **Choose loose fruits and vegetables over pre-cut or pre-packaged** to control quantity and ensure fresher ingredients.
- **Love ugly fruits and veggies.** They taste just as good and are just as nutritious as those with a “perfect” shape.
- **Be twice as smart on sales.** Buying in larger quantities only saves money if the food is used. Ask if stores offer the sale price even if you buy less than the advertised quantity.
- **Shop the bulk bins.** Take advantage of bulk bins that allow you to purchase the quantity you need. Take your own cloth bag or jar to fill.
- **Ask the butcher to repackage meat** if what is offered is more than you need.



# Understand the Date Labels: Are those dates actually 'expiration' dates?

Not sure what those food date labels mean? If you've been throwing away food because of the printed date, you're not alone. Here are four important things to know.

- **The only EXPIRATION date required by federal law is infant formula.** South Carolina requires quality date labels for eggs and shellfish. Other states may have label requirements as well.
- **Other food date labels refer to quality – not food safety.** These labels are not expiration dates. The dates are provided by manufacturers to give consumers an estimated time that the product will be of peak quality or to help the store determine how long to display the product. "Best by," "sell by," "use by" and others are defined below.
- **If stored properly, a product should be safe, wholesome and of good quality after its quality date.**



## End the Confusion: Food Date Labels Defined

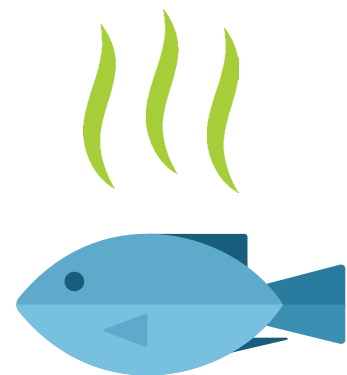
- **BEST BY, BEST IF USED BY or BEST IF USED BEFORE:** The manufacturer's recommendation for the best flavor or quality
- **SELL BY:** The store date for how long to display the product
- **USE BY or FREEZE BY:** The manufacturer's recommended date for use or freezing the product to ensure peak quality and flavor



## Use your eyes and your nose.

If you note any "off" odor, appearance, texture or color in the food – regardless of the date – do not risk it.

**DON'T EAT IT.**



# Smart \$aving:

Prep right. Love leftovers. Eat what you buy.



- **Prep right away.** When you get home from the store, wash, dry, chop, dice, slice and place your fresh food items in clear storage containers for snacks and easy cooking.
  - **Better yet – meal prep for the week** and store in the refrigerator or freezer. Just a couple of hours of cooking on the weekend can stock your fridge with full meals or a few healthy basics for the week.
  - **Plan wisely before cooking.** A significant part of food waste at home is caused by preparing too much food and not eating it. Not only do you waste food and money – but preparing too much may lead to overeating. Reduce portion size.
  - **Bigger isn't always better.** Consider using smaller plates and dishes. Some experts suggest that reducing the size of our plates would significantly reduce food waste.
  - **Love leftovers.** This is one of the easiest ways to reduce your food waste at home. The simplest way is to pack a lunch for work or school the night before. If you don't want to eat leftovers the day after they're cooked, freeze them and save for later.
  - **Be creative.** Give leftovers a new life. It can be fun and delicious. Use extra meatballs and sauce to make personal pizzas with veggies. Toss leftover rice and pasta into soup. Throw all your produce pieces together for a stir-fry.
  - **Try to use everything.** Keep your vegetable pieces, floppy carrots and celery in the freezer to make a veggie stock later. Adding icy water to wilted lettuce will help revive it. Save leftover bread by turning it into homemade croutons or bread crumbs. Other options to use food include juicing, blanching, preserving and dehydrating.
  - **Don't assume something can't be used.** There are countless recipes online to help you use leftovers and unusual parts of fruits, vegetables and meat.
  - **Rely on your freezer** – but remember what you froze. Keep labels and a marker handy to note what you are freezing and the date on each container.
- Best advice.** Eat what you buy.





# Smart Storage:

## Food Safety, Freshness & the Fridge

In 2012, the Royal Society, the world's oldest independent scientific academy, set out to decide what was the most important invention in the history of food.

The winner? **The refrigerator.**

**Check the temperature.**  
The refrigerator should be set at **40°F** or lower.

- **Avoid over-packing.** Cold air must circulate to keep food properly chilled.
- **Know what doesn't go.** Some items may seem like they belong in the fridge but don't. Let tomatoes sit on the counter at room temperature. Store potatoes, garlic and uncut onions separately in a cool, dark place in perforated baskets or bins that allow air flow.
- **Use your crisper bin(s) correctly.** Vegetables require higher humidity while fruits require lower humidity – which is why many refrigerators have two bins. If you only have one bin, store fruits elsewhere in the fridge because some release gas that cause other produce to spoil quickly.
- **Adjust accordingly – not all shelves are created equal.** Temperature varies throughout the refrigerator. The basic rule is that it is coldest at the bottom and the back and warmest at the top and near the front.
- **Practice FIFO – First in, First out.** When unpacking groceries, move older products to the front of your refrigerator, freezer and pantry. Put new products in the back. Print and attach an "Eat Soon" label to a container as a reminder. They are available on the DWFS website.
- **Clean spills immediately.** This reduces the growth of Listeria bacteria (which can grow at refrigerator temperatures).
- **Keep it covered.** Store food in covered containers or sealed storage bags to keep it fresh and avoid spills.
- **Keep a list on the fridge.** It will allow you to keep track of what you have and what needs to be used. Eat or freeze items before you have to toss them.
- **Check the dates.** If you aren't planning on consuming the item anytime soon, wrap it, label it and freeze it.
- **Remember the freezer.** Don't put stuff that belongs in the freezer in the fridge (e.g., big batches of leftovers like pasta sauce, soup and meat). Don't store bread in the fridge – that'll make it dry. Keep it in the freezer.



# Smart Freezing: Don't be left out in the cold.



**Check the temperature.**  
The freezer should be set at  
**0°F** or lower.

- **Don't overload the freezer.** Filling it to maximum capacity may prevent proper air circulation making it difficult to maintain its temperature.
- **You can freeze almost any food.** Freezing prevents the growth of microorganisms that cause both spoilage and foodborne illness. Food constantly stored at 0°F or lower will be safe.
- **Know the DNF list.** The “do not freeze” list – food that doesn't hold up well – includes raw and hard-boiled eggs, lettuce, citrus, watermelon, yogurt and anything carbonated.
- **Freeze food as fast as possible** to maintain peak freshness. Freshness and quality at the time of freezing affect the condition of frozen food.
- **Let hot foods reach room temperature before freezing.** This will help to freeze food uniformly and prevent opportunities for spoilage.
- **Avoid the burn.** Freezer burn is a food quality issue – **not a safety issue**. It is caused by air coming in contact with frozen food and appears as grayish-brown leathery

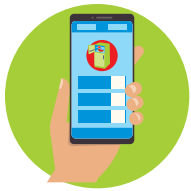
spots. Cut those portions either before or after cooking the food.

- **Proper packaging is key** to maintain quality. Use storage containers and wrappings designed for the freezer. When storing liquids, leave about 1 inch of space to allow for expansion. When freezing in baking dishes, wrap tightly. Using small containers (less than 1 quart) will ensure that the food freezes quickly. All packages should be secure, airtight and labeled with contents and date.
- **Keep a list.** Update it each time you put food in or take it out of the freezer. Use of an inventory can prevent over-storage of foods and loss of quality.
- **Freeze individual portions** to avoid having to defrost or reheat an entire batch.
- **Prepare freezer-friendly meals.** Just prep and freeze, then heat them on busy weeknights. Unlimited freezer-friendly recipes are available online.
- **Thaw safely before reheating.** There are three time-honored ways to thaw food: in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave.
- **Refreeze food?** Yes, you can refreeze as long as you followed all of the recommended practices to thaw it. Try not to, though – refreezing can degrade the texture, color and taste of many foods.
- **When in doubt, save it to compost.**

## Does freezing food affect nutrition?

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, freezing food does not destroy nutrients. In meat and poultry products, there is little change in nutrient value during freezer storage.





# Have questions about storing food properly? There's an APP for that.

Apps offer a variety of tools to:

- **Find shelf lives for specific items in the pantry, refrigerator and freezer;**
- **Learn better storage techniques;**
- **Provide cooking tips and recipes by ingredient;**
- **Organize grocery lists to help with meal planning;** and
- **Track when products were purchased** and give notifications when they are nearing the end of the recommended storage date.

**Fridge Pal** provides inventory and list-making capabilities, provides notifications when your items expire, plus, if you are at the grocery store and cannot remember if you need to replace a certain product, the barcode scanner allows the app to notify you if you are running low and need to purchase. **Download:** [Free on iTunes](#)



**Epicurious** provides a search function that starts with an ingredient and builds the recipe from there with over 30,000 recipes right at your fingertips. **Download:** [Free on iTunes](#) | [Free on Google Play](#)



**Fresh Box** provides a virtual refrigerator allowing users to take photos of individual items, adding the name, shelf life, and expiration date to help you know when you need to use each item. Users can set an alarm that alerts them when the food needs to be eaten. Once the photo has been created, it is added to the virtual shelf and can be seen at a glance to provide an overview of what is in the fridge. Once an item is used, the photo is grayed out rather than deleted, so that reentry of the item is easy when it is re-stocked. **Download:** [\\$ on iTunes](#)



**Fridge Check** provides recipes and meals based on what you currently have on hand. Also, offers a "Do Not Like" option for ingredients you want to avoid. **Download:** [Free on Google Play](#)



**Best Before** provides scanning of items and help with produce that cannot be scanned, providing an average life span so that you are aware of how long you have before your fruits or vegetables go bad with notifications when items are about to expire. **Download:** [\\$ on iTunes](#) | [Free on Google Play](#)



**Listick** provides a database of pretty much everything you'll find at the store, allowing you to plan your list in advance and cross off items with a simple finger swipe. Or if your significant other is at the store doing the shopping, you can instantly share your list with them, ensuring that nothing is overlooked. **Download:** [\\$ on iTunes](#) | [Free on Google Play](#)



**My Fridge Food** is a computer-based application that is a good way to keep track of the contents of your fridge. Finding the perfect recipe to use up your ingredients is easy and you can even submit recipes of your own. With frequent recipe contests, this computer-based app keeps frugal living fun for everyone. **Download:** [Free to Use on Their Website](#)



**The FoodKeeper** application, developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cornell University and the Food Marketing Institute, provides storage tips on numerous food and beverage items.





# Smart & Simple: Quick Tips to Waste Less

- 1. Plan ahead.** Create a meal plan based on items you already have at home.
- 2. Shop smart.** Make a list of items you still need and stick to it.
- 3. Understand the labels.** "Sell by," "use by" and "best by" are not expiration dates. Take smell test to see if items are still ok to eat.
- 4. Prep right.** Prep and portion food when you get home from the store.
- 5. Only cook what you'll eat.** Plan accordingly for your family or guests unless you love leftovers.
- 6. Be creative.** Use leftover meals to make new meals.
- 7. Store correctly.** Your fridge should be 40°F and your freezer should be 0°F. Make sure to put the older items up front so they get used first.

**Love your food!**



# REFRIGERATOR & FREEZER STORAGE CHART

These short but safe time limits will help keep refrigerated food 40° F (4° C) from spoiling or becoming dangerous. Since product dates aren't a guide for safe use of a product, consult this chart and follow these tips.

- Follow handling recommendations on product.
- Keep meat and poultry in its package until just before using.
- If freezing meat and poultry in its original package longer than 2 months, overwrap these packages with airtight heavy-duty foil, plastic wrap, or freezer paper; or place the package inside a plastic bag.

Because freezing 0° F (-18° C) keeps food safe indefinitely, the following recommended storage times are for quality only.

Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
<b>Eggs</b>		
Fresh, in shell	3 - 5 weeks	Don't freeze
Raw yolks, whites	2 - 4 days	1 year
Hard cooked	1 week	Don't freeze
Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes, opened	3 days	Don't freeze
unopened	10 days	1 year
<b>TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles</b>		
Keep frozen until ready to heat		3 - 4 months
<b>Deli &amp; Vacuum-Packed Products</b>		
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni salads	3 - 5 days	Don't freeze
Pre-stuffed pork & lamb chops, chicken breasts stuffed w/dressing	1 day	Don't freeze
Store-cooked convenience meals	3 - 4 days	Don't freeze
Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners with USDA seal, unopened	2 weeks	Don't freeze
<b>Raw Hamburger, Ground &amp; Stew Meat</b>		
Hamburger & stew meats	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
<b>Ham, Corned Beef</b>		
Corned beef in pouch with pickling juices	5 - 7 days	Drained, 1 month
Ham, canned, labeled "Keep Refrigerated," unopened	6 - 9 months	Don't freeze
opened	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, whole	7 days	1 - 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, half	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months
Ham, fully cooked, slices	3 - 4 days	1 - 2 months
<b>Hot Dogs &amp; Lunch Meats (in freezer wrap)</b>		
Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	1 - 2 months
unopened package	2 weeks	1 - 2 months
Lunch meats, opened package	3 - 5 days	1 - 2 months
unopened package	2 weeks	1 - 2 months

Product	Refrigerator	Freezer
<b>Soups &amp; Stews</b>		
Vegetable or meat-added & mixtures of them	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
<b>Bacon &amp; Sausage</b>		
Bacon	7 days	1 month
Sausage, raw from pork, beef, chicken or turkey	1 - 2 days	1 - 2 months
Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 - 2 months
<b>Fresh Meat (Beef, Veal, Lamb, &amp; Pork)</b>		
Steaks	3 - 5 days	6 - 12 months
Chops	3 - 5 days	4 - 6 months
Roasts	3 - 5 days	4 - 12 months
Variety meats (tongue, kidneys, liver, heart, chitterlings)	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
<b>Meat Leftovers</b>		
Cooked meat & meat dishes	3 - 4 days	2 - 3 months
Gravy & meat broth	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
<b>Fresh Poultry</b>		
Chicken or turkey, whole	1 - 2 days	1 year
Chicken or turkey, parts	1 - 2 days	9 months
Giblets	1 - 2 days	3 - 4 months
<b>Cooked Poultry, Leftover</b>		
Fried chicken	3 - 4 days	4 months
Cooked poultry dishes	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
Pieces, plain	3 - 4 days	4 months
Pieces covered with broth, gravy	3 - 4 days	6 months
Chicken nuggets, patties	3 - 4 days	1 - 3 months
<b>Fish &amp; Shellfish</b>		
Lean fish	1 - 2 days	6 - 8 months
Fatty fish	1 - 2 days	2 - 3 months
Cooked fish	3 - 4 days	4 - 6 months
Smoked fish	14 days	2 months
Fresh shrimp, scallops, crawfish, squid	1 - 2 days	3 - 6 months
Canned seafood (Pantry, 5 years)	after opening 3 - 4 days	out of can 2 months



**FDA** U.S. FOOD & DRUG  
ADMINISTRATION



**Don't Waste Food SC** is a collaborative outreach campaign that brings together shareholders from the public and private sectors dedicated to sharing knowledge, coordinating resources and working together to reduce food waste in South Carolina.

The goals of the campaign are to:

- **Increase the awareness of the economic, environmental and social impacts of wasted food;**
- **Inspire individuals, communities, businesses, organizations, schools and others to take action to reduce food waste** through prevention, donation and composting; and
- **Cut South Carolina's food waste in half by 2030.**

For more information or to get involved, visit [www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc](http://www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc) or email [dontwastefoodsc@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:dontwastefoodsc@dhec.sc.gov).



**Don't Waste Food SC** is a joint partnership between the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and the S.C. Department of Commerce.

# Resources & Contact Information

## DHEC RESOURCES

### DHEC's Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

Telephone ..... 1-800-768-7348

Website ..... [www.scdhec.gov/recycle](http://www.scdhec.gov/recycle)

### Don't Waste Food SC

Website ..... [www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc](http://www.scdhec.gov/dontwastefoodsc)

## OTHER SOUTH CAROLINA RESOURCES

### S.C. Department of Agriculture (SCDA)

Website ..... [www.agriculture.sc.gov](http://www.agriculture.sc.gov)

## FOOD DONATION LIABILITY LEGISLATION & REGULATIONS

### Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

Website ..... [www.feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html](http://www.feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/give-food/become-a-product-partner/protecting-our-food-partners.html)

Website ..... [www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm](http://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/resources/donations.htm)

### S.C. Code of Laws - Title 15 - Chapter 74 - Liability Exemption for Donors of Food

Website ..... [www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t15c074.php](http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t15c074.php)

## NATIONAL FOOD WASTE REDUCTION RESOURCES

### EPA

Website ..... [www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food](http://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food)

### Feeding America

Website ..... [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)

### U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Website ..... [www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste](http://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste)

### U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Website ..... [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov)

### Save the Food

Website ..... [www.savethefood.com](http://www.savethefood.com)



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