

Ask an Expert – Small Actions Can Make a Big Difference in Fighting Food Waste

Palak Gupta

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Stop Food Waste Day is Wednesday, April 29, a day intended to raise awareness and inspire action to reduce the amount of annual global food waste.

In addition to being a global issue, food waste is also a very local issue. In fact, a large share of food waste happens right at home, often unintentionally, due to spoilage, overbuying, or uncertainty about how to use it.

The good news? Small, practical changes at home can add up to helpful reductions in food waste, while saving money and supporting healthier eating. Here are some evidence-informed, daily actions you can take to reduce food waste and make the most of your food.

1. Start with Awareness

The first step to reducing food waste is simply noticing it. Take a week to pay attention to what you throw away and why. Was it forgotten in the back of the fridge? Did plans change? Awareness creates opportunity for change.

Tip: Keep a short “food-use check-in” once a week to see what needs to be eaten, frozen, or shared.

2. Store Food to Extend Freshness

Improper storage is a major reason fruits and vegetables go to waste. Knowing which foods go in the fridge, which stay on the counter, and which benefit from breathable storage can dramatically extend shelf life.

- Store most fruits and vegetables separately.
- Keep herbs in a jar with water or wrapped in a damp towel.

- Freeze foods you won't use right away – especially bread, berries, and chopped vegetables.

Tip: Freezing reduces waste and preserves nutrients. Frozen counts!

3. Plan for Flexibility, Not Just Meals

Meal planning doesn't have to mean rigid schedules. Build flexibility by planning a few “use-it-up” meals each week, such as in soups, stir-fries, tacos, or grain bowls.

Tip: Designate one night a week as “clean-out-the-fridge” night.

4. Use the Whole Ingredient

Many parts of the foods we throw away are edible and nutritious. Stems, peels, scraps, and leftovers can often be reused creatively.

- Broccoli stems can be shredded or stir-fried.
- Vegetable scraps can become stock.
- Overripe fruit works great in smoothies, muffins, or sauces.

Tip: Think in terms of “repurposing” instead of leftovers.

5. Understand Dates, Don't Fear Them

“Best by” and “use by” dates often indicate quality, not safety. Many foods are still safe to eat after these dates if they look, smell, and taste okay.

Tip: Trust your senses and avoid tossing food just because of a date.

6. Involve Kids and Family Members

When children help with planning, cooking, tasting, or even composting, food waste goes down. Exposure builds curiosity and willingness to try foods – which means less waste.

Tip: Let kids help choose one produce item each week and decide how to use it.

7. Share When You Have Excess

If you have extra produce or food you can't use, consider sharing with neighbors, friends, or community food pantries. Sharing tables, community fridges, and informal sharing networks help keep good food from going to waste.

Reducing food waste saves money, supports household food security, protects the environment, and honors the resources it takes to grow, transport, and prepare food. When communities take action at home, those changes ripple outward and support more resilient, sustainable food systems.

Contact

Palak Gupta

Utah State University Extension hunger solutions specialist

Palak.Gupta@usu.edu

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