

What's your Foodprint?

This year's World Environment Day focused on reducing our **foodprint**. Food waste is a massive global problem that has big humanitarian, environmental and financial implications. The good news is that with relative ease and a few simple changes to our habits, we can shrink the problem.

The www.thinkeatsave.org and www.lovefoodhatewaste.com webpages provide tips to reduce food waste:

1. Think Before You Shop - more than a third of us go shopping without a list.
 - ü Check what you have at home before you shop.
 - ü Make a list - Plan your meals, make sure you get what you need.
 - ü When you shop with meals in mind - you'll end up throwing less away and save money.
 - ü Avoid impulse buys. Don't succumb to marketing tricks that lead you to buy more food than you need, particularly perishable items. What's less expensive per ounce is more expensive overall if much of that food is discarded.

2. Use Or Lose Your Food - 60% of us end up throwing away food because it's passed its 'use-by' date.
 - ü Use 'First-in-First-Out' as a kitchen rule. Check your pantry. Use up first what you bought first. Store new purchases at the back of the cupboard.
 - ü Understand Expiration Dates— in the US, "sell-by" and "use-by" dates are not federally regulated and do not indicate safety, except on certain baby foods. Rather, they are manufacturer suggestions for peak quality. Most foods can be safely consumed well after their use-by dates:
 - According to [USDA.gov](http://www.usda.gov) fact sheets: "'Use-by' dates usually refer to best quality and are not safety dates. But even if the date expires during home storage, a product should be safe, wholesome and of good quality if handled properly and kept at 40 °F or below." If product has a "use-by" date, follow that date. If a product has a "sell-by" date or no date, cook or freeze the product by the times on the charts at www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/food_product_dating/.
 - ü Know your fridge - keep an eye on what's inside. Be mindful of the perishable food you have and plan meals to use them up and prevent unnecessary waste.

3. Sustain Your Fridge - 70% of our refrigerators are set at too high a temperature.
 - ü Store food according to the instructions on the package - leaving food out of the fridge can cut the life of foods like milk, cooked meats and salad by up to 100%.
 - ü Keep your fridge between 1-5°C (~35–40°F) - this helps you get the best from your food. If your fridge doesn't indicate temperature, think about investing in a fridge thermometer.
 - ü Use Your Freezer—frozen foods remain safe indefinitely. Freeze produce and leftovers if you won't have the chance to eat them before they go bad. You can also do this with take-out leftovers, to save for later.

4. Love Your Leftovers - more than half of households say they throw away food because they've cooked too much.
 - ü Using leftovers to make delicious meals is a smart way to ensure you use everything you buy.

- ü Ask your restaurant to pack up your extras so you can eat them later. Freeze them if you don't want to eat immediately. Too few take their leftovers home from restaurants, too many of us waste that food.
 - ü Better yet, request smaller portions—restaurants will often provide half-portions upon request at reduced prices.
5. Feed Your Garden - on average over 70% of household food waste is landfilled each year.
- ü Compost your kitchen and garden waste. Everything from vegetable scraps to fruit peelings, teabags, coffee grounds, eggshells and small amounts of paper and soft cardboard can be home-composted.
 - ü Composting reduces the amount of rubbish you put out for collection and creates a free, nutritious fertilizer that will help make your garden more beautiful.
 - ü See last week's 'Green Sense' column for tips on organic gardening with your compost.

So, **Think** ahead when making food purchases, buy only what you and your family can **Eat**, reducing waste, and you'll **Save**.

A column by Reading Climate committee member Gina Snyder