

Want to reduce your food waste at home? Here are the six best evidence-based ways to do it

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From the farm to the plate, the modern day food system [has a waste problem](#). Each year, a third of all food produced around the world, or

[1.3 billion tons](#), ends up as rubbish. Imagine that for a moment—it's like buying three bags of groceries at the supermarket then throwing one away as you leave.

Wasting [food](#) feeds climate change. Food [waste](#) accounts for more than 5% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. And this doesn't include emissions from activities required to actually produce the food in the first place, such as farming and transport.

One of the largest sites of food waste [is the home](#). In [Australia](#), households throw out about 2.5 million tons of food each year. That equates to [between](#) A\$2,000 and \$2,500 worth of food per year per household.

But there's some good news. Our [Australian-first research](#), released today, identified the six most effective behaviors anyone can do to reduce food waste. Combined, these relatively small changes can make a big difference.

What we did

Food waste by households is a complex problem influenced by [many factors](#). Some, such as food type, package size and safety standards, are out of a consumer's control. But some are insignificant [daily behaviors](#) we can easily change, such as buying too much, forgetting about food at the back of your fridge, not eating leftovers and cooking too much food.

We wanted to better understand the complex nature of household food waste. Together with Australia's leading food rescue organization [OzHarvest](#), our [research](#) sought to identify and prioritize evidence-based actions to reduce the amount of food Australians throw away.

We reviewed Australian and international literature, and held online

workshops with 30 experts, to collate a list of 36 actions to reduce food waste. These actions can be broadly grouped into: planning for shopping, shopping, storing food at home, cooking and eating.

We realized this might be an overwhelming number of behaviors to think about, and many people wouldn't know where to start. So we then surveyed national and international food waste experts, asking them to rank behaviors based on their impact in reducing food waste.

We also surveyed more than 1,600 Australian households. For each behavior, participants were asked about:

- the amount of thinking and planning involved (mental effort)
- how much it costs to undertake the behavior (financial effort)
- household "fit" (effort involved in adopting the behavior based on different schedules and food preferences in the household).

Consumers identified mental effort as the most common barrier to reducing food waste.

What we found

Our research identified the three top behaviors with the highest impact in reducing food waste, which are also relatively easy to implement:

- Prepare a weekly meal at home that combines food needing to be used up
- Designate a shelf in the fridge or pantry for foods that need to be used up
- Before cooking a meal, check who in the household will be eating, to ensure the right amount is cooked.

Despite these actions being relatively easy, we found few Australian

consumers had a "use it up" shelf in the fridge or pantry, or checked how many household members will be eating before cooking a meal.

Experts considered a weekly "use-it-up" meal to be the most effective behavior in reducing food waste. Many consumers reported they already did this at home, but there is plenty of opportunity for others to adopt it.

Some consumers are more advanced players who have already included the above behaviors in their usual routines at home. So for those people, our research identified a further three behaviors requiring slightly more effort:

- Conduct an audit of weekly food waste and set reduction goals
- Make a shopping list and stick to it when shopping
- Make a meal plan for the next three to four days.

Our research showed a number of actions which, while worthwhile for many reasons, experts considered less effective at reducing food waste. They were also less likely to be adopted by consumers. The actions included:

- Preserving perishable foods by pickling, saucing or stewing for later use
- Making a stock of any food remains (bones and peels) and freeze for future use
- Buying food from local specialty stores (such as greengrocers and butchers) rather than large supermarkets.

Doing our bit

Today is the United Nations' [International Day](#) of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste. It seeks to increase awareness and prompt action in support of a key target in the global [Sustainable Development Goals](#) to

halve food loss and waste by 2030.

Australia has [signed up](#) to this goal, and we hope this research helps fast-track those efforts.

OzHarvest is launching its national [Use-It-Up](#) food waste campaign today, aiming to support Australians with information, resources and tips. Based on our findings, we've also developed a decision-making tool to help policy makers target appropriate [food waste](#) behaviors.

Australia, and the world, can stop throwing away perfectly edible food—but everyone must play their part.

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