

Avoiding food waste over the holidays to save money and the planet

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Roni Neff, Ph.D., an associate professor in the Department of Environmental Health and Engineering at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, leads the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Food Systems and Climate Change team and co-directs a national food waste research network.

Her research is driven by concern about global environmental challenges, including the opportunity for mitigation through food system interventions addressing food waste and consumption patterns; the need to adapt [food systems](#) in order to improve resilience to climate change and other threats; and the need for attention to equity issues throughout.

Neff says, "During this season of holiday meals, [family gatherings](#), and parties, it's important to consider what happens to our leftover food when the festivities end. Here in the U.S., as much as 40% of our [food supply](#) goes to waste—that's an average cost of \$1,500 per year, per household of four, on food that just goes in the trash and then contributes to our growing [climate change](#) crisis.

"Fortunately, there's a lot we can do to avoid so much food waste—from freezing food before it goes bad to [online tools](#) that help assess how much to buy and how to get creative with leftovers. With just a little bit of planning, food waste can be prevented this [holiday season](#), with enormous benefits for our own households and our planet."

Details about food waste in the U.S., its impact on the planet, and how food waste can be prevented are below.

Facts about food waste in the US

- 30% to 40% of the food supply goes to waste.
- A household of four spends an average of \$1,500 per year on food that ends up being discarded.
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that producing food that ends up wasted requires the amount of energy and water that would have been required to supply more than 50 million homes.
- Food waste causes greenhouse gas emissions that equal more than 42 [coal-fired power plants](#), according to the EPA.

- The U.S. government aims to cut food waste by 50% by 2030, and just published a draft national strategy to work toward that goal.

In the U.S., households are the largest source of [food waste](#). Food is discarded for numerous reasons, such as fears about food safety, wanting to only eat the freshest food, and unpredictable schedules.

Tips to avoid food waste

- Stop and notice: Think about what led to the need to throw it out, to help you think about the strategies for prevention that might be most helpful for your own situation. Strategies might include storing leftovers more prominently in the refrigerator, meal planning that includes use of leftovers, etc.
- Be realistic: Buy and take only what you think you can eat.
- Use your freezer: If you can't eat something before it goes bad, or if you made too much, label it with the date and freeze it.
- For holiday gatherings: Use online estimators to help you figure out how much food to prepare or buy and utilize containers to help share the leftovers.
- Get creative with leftovers: Online tools allow consumers to enter what [food items](#) they have and get some inspiring ideas for how to use them.
- Learn about expiration date labels: Date labels do not generally refer to [food safety](#). Most foods do not become dangerous based on how old they are but on how they are stored and whether they have been contaminated. (There are a few exceptions, such as deli meats and soft cheeses.)

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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