

Waste Warriors

Food waste in the UK is a massive problem with the equivalent of 1 in 6 shopping bags or 1 in 8 prepared meals going in the bin from households across the nation. With most of this waste destined for landfill or incineration, food waste remains one of the biggest challenges we face globally. If food waste was a country, it would be the third biggest GHG (Green House Gas) emission source after China and the USA.

Most of us to a greater or lesser extent are 'Food Wasters', so here are some tips, some of which you may already do, to make you into a 'Waste Warrior'. Everyone is different so some tips may not work for you, but don't worry there are plenty of tips to try. Continue to reduce your waste in as many ways as you can to help the planet and the environment, for the younger generations to come.

Tip 1: Take Stock

Less than a third of households check the fridge, freezer or cupboards before going shopping. (Source: BBC Studios Science Unit)

- Do a stock take before you shop for food, don't buy things you already have!
- Check the backs of cupboards etc ... to see what is going off soonest. Make a plan to use them for snacks or meals. Place them near the front so that they are near your eye-line, or clearly visible as a reminder.
- Shop wisely, by sticking to the shopping list and avoid buying bulk deals if you are realistically not going to eat them e.g. the £1 per packet biscuit deals!

Tip 2: Storing commonly wasted foods.

Everyday homes in the UK throw away approximately 800,000 whole apples. That's a lot of apples!

- **Apples** and other fruit (except bananas) are best kept in their original packaging in the fridge. You'll be amazed how long over the 'best before date' they will last in there.
- **Bread** should be stored in a cool dark place, not in the fridge. If you don't have a bread bin then use a cupboard. Bread can be frozen by separating the slices (perhaps best in pairs to make sandwiches) so its easier to take what you need and then the bread lasts longer.
- **Potatoes** must also be stored in a cool dark place (not the fridge), away from the onions too (Both onions and potatoes release moisture, which can lead to faster spoiling).
- **Salad ingredients.** Cucumber and bagged salads should be kept in their original packaging in the fridge.
- **Tomatoes** should be stored at room temperature, not in the fridge. Store them stem side down to help keep in the moisture and retain their juiciness.
- **Herbs.** Place soft herbs like mint, in a glass filled 1/3 with water in the fridge to increase its shelf life. Make sure to remove any leaves close to the end of the stem so they aren't submerged in the water as this will spoil the mint quicker. Wrap hardy herbs, like rosemary, in damp kitchen paper and put in a sealed container in the fridge.

N.B. Make sure you always check the label for advice too

Tip 3: How Long

Every year around half a million pounds worth of food is thrown away from homes, linked to the 'Best before' date – 130,000 tonnes.

41% of food is thrown away because it is not used in time. Less than 1 in 5 of us, rarely or never refer to on-pack information about how long to store items once they have been opened.

'Use by' – refers to safety: you must not eat food past the 'use by' date. Whereas 'Best before' – refers to quality: food will be at its best before the date given. It might not be at its best after the date, but should be safe to eat. Use your sense to make a judgement.

A guide to a few key foods items and how long after the date they can be eaten:

- **Fresh, uncut fruit and vegetables** – the quality of the best before date depends on the type of food, its variety and seasonality. It may range from 1 additional day (for perishable items) to two weeks for more robust crops like swedes.
- **Bread and Bakery products** – remain good to eat for between 2 days for bread, and up to 1 week for other bakery products. Some bakery items are sold in long-life packaging (e.g. Pitta bread) so can be eaten for a longer period of time after the 'Best before' date. This may be a month longer.
- **Frozen food** – will be safe to eat for months after the 'Best before' date. Check your freezer temperature, freezers should ideally always run at -18°C. If yours is a -18 a three star rating means it will keep for three months; four stars is even longer!
- **Store cupboard foods** – will all be safe to eat for months, sometimes years:
 - ◇ Crisps – 1 month
 - ◇ Biscuits, cereal – 6 months
 - ◇ Canned meat and soup, confectionary, drinks (cans / plastic / glass, pasta – up to three years.
 - ◇ Dried pasta - - up to three years
 - ◇ Jams – up to three years.

Tip 4: Freeze it

Only a third of us refer to on-pack information about how long items can be frozen. 1% of the fruit we waste is wasted because we haven't used it in time.

You can freeze almost any fruit. Put it in a handy (re-useable) freezer bag and simply grab a handful next time you are making a porridge or a smoothie.

Don't throw milk away you're not going to use. Pour it into an ice-cube tray to freeze it, in perfect tea-sized portions. (Milk is never wasted in some houses if you drink an awful lot of tea!)

Grate up your cheese and then freeze it, even if it's gone a bit hard – its perfect for grabbing as much as you need for your toastie or pizza.

Cut chicken or turkey breasts into thin strips, lay them on a tray and put the tray in the freezer. Once frozen you can pack the strips in bags (if you freeze chicken breasts whole you end up with five or six breasts stuck together!) Freezing on a tray first means they won't stick together and are easy to use later.

That tip about freezing on a tray first can be applied to potatoes, peppers, blackcurrants and many other foods.

Tip 5: Don't scrap it!

People don't always think of every part of fruits and vegetables as edible e.g. Carrot peels.

Most of us tend to throw away bits we chopped off when cooking, like celery ends and onion skins.

Every day in the UK homes we throw away a lot of edible fruit and veg.

- 1.2 million whole tomatoes
- 720,000 whole oranges

- 2.7 million whole carrots
- 970,000 whole onions
- 920,000 whole bananas

Larger pieces of fruit and veg that aren't all used up should be put in a specially designated box in the fridge, so they won't be forgotten for the next meal.

Tomatoes are like bread, no one wants to eat the slice at the stalk end, and this usually goes in the bin. These can be chopped up and frozen in a designated freezer bag, to eventually go into making vegetable stock or tomato soup once enough is stored. A tomato is still safe to eat even if the skin is a bit wrinkly.

Citrus peels shouldn't end up in the bin, they can be used in many ways. Try drying the peels, to give flavour to all manner of dishes in the future. Peel citrus fruits before reducing the ease and dehydrate the peels in a low oven.

Tip 6: Mash it

Potatoes are by far the top UK household food item to be thrown away.

On average, 421g of fresh potatoes are consumed per person per week in UK households in 2017 / 2018. However, still every day in the UK homes we throw away the equivalent of approximately 4.4 million whole potatoes.

Use the whole potato in your mash, skins provide nutrients and flavour.

Left over mashed potatoes can be re-purposed to make potato pancakes, scones or fishcakes. It can be frozen in scoops or a sheet for topping pies etc. It can be made into potato soup topped with crispy bacon and chives or even gnocchi. Potatoes can be kept well past the 'Best before' date. They can last several months if stored correctly: kept cool in a dark place with plenty of ventilation.

Before cooking, make sure to inspect each potato and use any with blemishes or sprouting bits first.

(Never eat green potatoes – they are poisonous!)

Tip 7: Juice it

1.5 million tonnes of avoidable food and drink waste is disposed of via the sewage in the UK each year: milk, soft drinks, fruit juice and smoothies account for 710,000 tons, or nearly half of the total.

£160 million of fruit juices / smoothies go to waste via the sink and sewer each year. These are more likely to be poured away because of not being in time or because of confusion over date labels.

£190 million is spent by UK households on fizzy drinks each year that are being thrown away via household drains.

Fizzy drinks: large bottles are often cheaper than small bottles, which leads to the bottle being opened several times, losing its fizz each time. No one like flat pop! But for those times when fizzy drinks do go flat you can use them to braise meat, like pulled pork or perhaps create a barbecue sauce.

Fruit juice / Smoothies:

- Pour any excess into lolly moulds and freeze
- Soak oats with leftover juice / smoothie for a speedy breakfast
- Many fruit juices can be frozen, some quality may be lost but they can still be drunk or used in cooking.

Tip 10: Too much?

It's all getting bigger! - on average between 1993 and 2013:

- Shepherd's pies ready meals almost doubled in size.
- Bagels increased in size from 70g to 86 g.

- A family pack of crisps increased by 50% from 100 to 250G.
- A portion of peanuts is now 80% bigger
- An individual chicken pie is now 40% bigger

Choosing a smaller shopping trolley or basket when shopping can help you to avoid over-buying. The bigger the shopping trolleys, the more likely we are to fill them up, with things we don't need.

It is often difficult to predict how much food will arrive when we order in a restaurant or café, so it's never a bad idea to ask the waiter about portion sizes. This could help with excess foods outside the home.

Tip 11: Food Portions

A Danish survey showed that if a plate size is reduced by just 9%, the food waste can be reduced by over 45%. Another survey found that we don't even notice when food portions are 20% smaller, but we do like our plates to look fairly full!

Having larger than average food plates is a factor in our weight problems, and also contributes to food waste. Why not consider buying some smaller dinner plates than the ones you currently use.

Eating the same amount of food from a smaller plate can leave us more satisfied than eating the same amount off a larger plate, and there is less waste.

What should we be eating?

- Fruit and veg – 5+ portions per day
- Starchy carbohydrates – 3-4 portions per day
- Protein foods – 2-3 portions per day
- Dairy and alternatives – 2-3 portions per day.

Tip 12: Portion control

People leave approximately 6% of home-cooked meals on their plates. This doubles to 12% when people are eating pre-prepared meals 53% of people think that take-away / dining out portions are unnecessarily large.

If you are intending to make enough for food for an evening meal plus tomorrow's lunch, portion it out before you even sit down to eat. It's much harder to stop eating when there is still food on your plate!

With 1/3 of consumers not checking portion size on labels, this can cause us to eat far more of our favourite sugary and fatty snacks than intended. Try not to eat straight out of the bag and pre-measure portions to make your snacks go further, as well as limiting the amount you eat.

Tip 13: Takeaways

In 2018, the average household threw away nearly one tenth (9%) of takeaway food they ordered.

One in four customers (25%) said that more than half the time when they ordered a takeaway, they had leftovers that ended up in the bin. The most common cause of unintentionally

ordering larger portions than they needed was with rice and chips – thus leading to more waste.

Chinese: White rice – it is possible to reheat rice safely. Cool the rice as quickly as possible (ideally within one hour). Keep the rice in the fridge no more than one day until reheating. When you do reheat the rice, always check that it is steaming hot all the way through. Do not reheat rice more than once.

Indian: Cheat's Biryani – stir raw rice with leftover curry together and cover with hot water / stock. Bake in an oven for a very easy and quick dinner.

The Chippy: Leftover chips can be frozen on a lined baking tray before bagging up. Reheat in a deep fryer or hot oven until crisp and piping hot again.

Pizza: Add a glass of water if reheating pizza in the microwave, this will help the base stay crisp and the cheese to melt.

Tip 14: Down the drain

Having seen the news articles on the TV about 'Fat bergs' reminds us what waste NOT to put down our drains.

When loading your dishwasher, remember to scrape off all excess food into the food bin (even if it's the tiniest amount). Use a piece of kitchen paper to wipe the surface clean before putting it into the dishwasher. This ensures that the least amount of food waste goes down the drain.. (Try to use one piece of kitchen paper to wipe all dishes clean, to avoid extra waste.

If rinsing off in the sink, make sure that you have a food collector over the sink hole to catch any small amounts of food. Once finished empty the collected food into the food waste bin.

Never, never put cooking fat, or oil down the drain. Use a food jar with a lid, to collect any of these. Small amounts of solid fat can be put into your household food bin. Larger quantities and liquid fat will need to be disposed of at a council recycling centre.

According to the North London Waste Authority, once the liquid fat is collected, the oil can be converted into high quality biofuel for the distribution and power generation industries.

Small amounts of oil can be composted at home, but you need to ensure that it is mixed well with paper or cardboard first.

Tip 15: Down the toilet

It seems that 'fat bergs' are created not just from food waste, but also from other things put down the toilet.

The toilet is only designed for bodily waste and toilet paper.

Toilet paper is designed in such a way that it breaks up during its journey through the sewers, so no-one should be putting nappies, earbuds, cotton wool, wipes down the toilet.

There has been a move towards using flushable toilet wipes, but these should not be mistaken for baby wipes. The only flushable wipes that should be flushed down the toilet are ones that have the 'Fine to flush' certification mark on the packet. These wipes, like toilet paper are designed to break up in transit to the water treatment plant and are 0% plastic.

Tip 16: Batch Cooking

Batch cooking, especially for a larger family can be essential. Especially if both parents work or are employed on a shift system. Also, if you don't enjoy cooking! Batch cooking can help to avoid food wastage.

There are plenty of recipes online and in many recipe books, from a variety of different chefs that can provide you with batch designed meals

Examples are: minced Bolognese which can be used with spaghetti, in a lasagne or in a Chili con carne. Portions of chicken can be batch cooked, to be used in chicken burgers, chicken curry or nuggets for dipping.

Obviously, planning is required and there are ways of getting the children involved in the preparation and cooking as well. For a busy family, this makes the organisation and prepping for dinner times much easier throughout the week.

Tip 17: Composting

If you are a gardener or have an allotment, then composting can also put food waste to good use.

Firstly, the council now usually provide you with a food disposal bin which is collected weekly. Food waste is then put to good use.

If you have your own compost bin/s then every scrap of waste food, including that collected in the sink drain collector, can go into a collecting bin before it is transported to the compost bin. It simply requires you to have a food bin on the kitchen surface, handily available. In addition to the food, you can also include kitchen tissues or shredded cardboard. This also breaks down and adds to the quality of the compost. Peelings and food that has deteriorated can go into compost, as well.

Ideally you should have two compost bins. One is for adding to on a daily basis the other is for producing the compost once it is full. You do have to be patient! It is always surprising how the fresh compost reduces in bulk after you have added new. Sometimes it appears never to get full.

You can also add your shredded paper to the compost bin and cardboard packaging.

It is remarkable how all the garden waste and the food waste turns into lovely friable potting material, or additional organic soil improver.

There is also a system called a Bokashi Composter. This consists of a plastic container, with a tightly fitting lid, which has a tap at the bottom. You simply add all the food waste, and mix each addition with inoculated Bokashi Bran. This promotes anaerobic fermentation of vegetables, meat and dairy. After a while, liquid is produced which can be drained through the tap. This liquid is great for adding to your watering can as a fertiliser! Once the bin is full and fermentation has taken place then you can put the partly degraded food onto the compost heap. Again, ideally, it's best to have two bins, one for filling up, the other full one fermenting away! They are often sold in packs of two.

(N.B. All statistics are from the BBC Studio's Science Unit)

Waste Warriors

Vikkie and the Thompson family provide their food waste tips, picked up from participating on Channel 4's Cook Clever, Waste Less with Prue & Rupy which first aired on the 27th May.

Some of the tips you may already do, which is awesome, keep that up, but for others, this may all be new ideas for you. Continue to reduce your waste in as many ways as possible to help the planet and the environment for the younger generations that come after you.

Good luck!