

10 tips for reducing wasted food this holiday season

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The holidays are a time of feasting and indulging, and with that comes the fact that inevitably more food gets tossed into the garbage after a holiday meal.

According to the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental research organization, Americans generate an extra 5 million tons of household waste each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

To reduce the amount of food that gets thrown out, you can plan for how much you'll need before you start cooking, and also control portion size during the meal. Plus you can make the most of the leftovers once the holiday feast is at an end.



Steps to curb food waste from the Worldwatch Institute:

1. Plan how much food you and your guests will realistically need. The fear of not providing enough to eat often causes hosts to cook too much.
2. Create a shopping list and stick to it. This can reduce the risk of impulse buys, or buying too much of one thing.
3. Reduce the amount left on plates. The holiday season often promotes plates piled high with food. You can use smaller serving utensils or plates to encourage smaller portions, and guests can always take seconds.
4. Allow guests to serve themselves, choosing what, and how much, they would like to eat. This also helps reduce the amount of unwanted food left on plates.
5. Store leftovers properly. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that hot foods be left out for no more than two hours. Store leftovers in smaller, individually sized containers, making them more convenient to grab for a quick meal.
6. Consider composting scraps of food. Individual composting systems can be relatively easy and inexpensive, and compost can do wonders for garden soil.
7. If composting is not an option, look into creative new recipes for leftovers. For example, vegetable scraps and turkey carcasses can be boiled down for stock and soups, and bread crusts can be used for croutons.
8. Donate holiday meal excess. To find a food bank near you, visit the organization's Food Bank Locator.
9. Support food-recovery programs. In some cases, food-recovery systems will come to you to collect your excess. In New York City, City Harvest collects about 28 million pounds of food each year, providing groceries and meals for over 300,000 people, the Worldwatch Institute reports.
10. Think carefully about giving food items as holiday gifts. Avoid perishable items, and select foods that you know the recipient will enjoy. For example, chocolate, coffee, and tea all have long shelf lives.

For more helpful advice about planning a Thanksgiving Day meal check out our [Six things to do now if you're cooking Thanksgiving dinner](#), plus [seven safety tips for Thanksgiving Day](#).

Reducing Food Waste during the Holiday Season [Nourishing the Planet]

—*Maggie Shader*