

How much food are you wasting during the holidays?

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By **Al Jones** | Kalamazoo Gazette



Matthew Mead / Associated Press. Worldwatch Institute finds that an extra 5 million tons of household waste is generated each year in the United States from Thanksgiving to New Year's, including three times as much food waste as at other times of the year.

My grandmother used to marvel that I could, at age 9, eat a turkey leg and still want more. Like my mother, she was always making sure no food was wasted. For people of a certain age, there was always the admonition about starving children in the horn of Africa and how starving people in

other far-off lands would fight from the scraps off our plates.

I have never doubted that. I have always appreciated the idea of having enough to eat. And I have always felt that my family was among the fortunate at Christmas time. All that leads to the realization that with lots of food at the holidays, comes of waste. It also leads to what I think are some sound suggestions on reducing food waster during the holidays, as offered by the **Worldwatch Institute**. The Institute, a 37-year-old, independent, Washington, D.C.-based organization focused on developing data and innovative strategies to help achieve a sustainable society.

It finds that an extra 5 million tons of household waste is generated each year in the United States from Thanksgiving to New Year's, including three times as much food waste as at other times of the year. They also stated that consumers in developed countries such as the United States are responsible for 222 million tons of this waste, or nearly the same quantity of food as is produced in all of sub-Saharan Africa. It offers 10 tips to reduce the amount of food we waste:

1. **Plan your menu for how much food you'll need, and be realistic** -- The fear of not providing enough to eat often causes hosts to cook too much. Instead, plan out how much food you and your guests will realistically need, and stock up accordingly.
2. **Create a shopping list before heading out to buy** -- Sticking to the list will reduce the risk of impulse buys or buying unnecessary quantities, particularly since stores typically use holiday sales to entice buyers to spend more.
3. **Control the amount on your plate** -- Go small. The season of indulgence often promotes plates piled high with more food than can be eaten. Simple tricks of using smaller serving utensils or plates can encourage smaller portions, reducing the amount left on plates. Guests can always take second (or third!) servings if still hungry.
4. **Encourage self-serve** -- Allow guests to serve themselves, choosing what, and how much, they would like to eat. This helps to make meals feel more familiar and also reduces the amount of unwanted food left on guests' plates.
5. **After the meal, make the most out of leftovers** -- Store leftovers safely to preserve them for future meals. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that hot foods be left out for no more than two hours.
6. **Compost food scraps** -- Instead of throwing out the vegetable peels, eggshells and other food scraps from making your meal, consider composting them. Individual composting systems can be relatively easy and inexpensive, and provide quality inputs for garden soils.
7. **Create new meals** -- Check out Love Food Hate Waste's creative recipes to see if your food scraps can be used for new meals. Vegetable scraps and turkey carcasses can be easily boiled down for stock and soups, and bread crusts and ends can be used to make tasty homemade croutons.
8. **Donate excess** -- Food banks and shelters gladly welcome donations of canned and dried foods, especially during the holiday season and colder months.
9. **Support food-recovery programs** -- In some cases, food-recovery systems will come to you to collect your excess.
10. **When giving food as a gift, avoid highly perishable items** -- And make an effort to select foods that you know the recipient will enjoy rather than waste.