



Top 10 tips to reduce food waste during the holiday season

By [EarthSky](#) NOV 23, 2011



Image Credit: Deborah Byrd

Here are 10 simple tips to help make this holiday season less wasteful and more plentiful.

The holiday season for us in the U.S. is supposed to mean family, love, warmth ... and food. All that extra holiday food often means spectacular amounts of waste. In the United States, we generate an extra 5 million tons of household waste each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's, including three times as much food waste as at other times of the year, according to the Worldwatch Institute of Washington D.C. That's in contrast to our total food waste of 34 million tons each year. With the holidays upon us, here are 10 simple steps from the Worldwatch Institute to help make this season less wasteful and more plentiful.

Before the meal: Plan your menu and exactly how much food you'll need.

1. 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. [LoveFoodHateWaste.com](#) can help you figure out your [perfect portion size](#).

2. Plan ahead. A shopping list will reduce the risk of impulse buys or buying unnecessary quantities, particularly since stores typically use holiday sales to entice buyers into spending more.



Image Credit: Deborah Byrd

During the meal: Control the amount on your plate to reduce the amount in the garbage.

3. Go small. The season of indulgence often promotes plates piled high with more food than can be eaten. Here's a tip: try smaller serving utensils or plates.

4. Encourage self-serve. This helps to make meals feel more familiar and also reduces the amount of unwanted food left on guests' plates.

After the meal: Make the most out of leftovers.

5. Store leftovers safely. 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 rather than being passed over and eventually wasted.

6. Compost food scraps. Individual composting systems can be relatively easy and inexpensive, provide a happy home for vegetable peels, eggshells and other scraps – and ultimately provide quality inputs for garden soils. Check out HomeCompostingMadeEasy.com for tips on [how to compost](#).
7. Create new meals from table scraps. 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 boiled down for stock and soups, and bread crusts and ends can be used to make 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. The charity group Feeding America partners with over 200 local food banks across the United States, supplying food to more than 37 million people each year. To find a food bank near you, check out the [Feeding America in your Community tool](#) in the right-hand column of their homepage.
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](#), the world's first food-rescue organization, collects approximately 28 million pounds of food each year that would otherwise go to waste, providing groceries and meals for over 300,000 people.

Throughout the holiday season: Consider what you're giving.

10. Think before you give. 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. The Rainforest Alliance, an international nonprofit, works with farmers and producers in tropical areas to ensure they are practicing environmentally sustainable and socially just methods. The group's [certified chocolates, coffee, and teas](#) are great gifts that have with long shelf-lives, and buying them helps support businesses and individuals across the world.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, roughly one-third of all food produced for human consumption – approximately 1.3 billion tons – is lost or wasted each year. 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.

Thank you for reading this! Have a warm and waste-reduced holiday season this year.

