

September 2019

All You Can Eat ~

Your Energy Committee would like to share ways a healthier lifestyle can help you and the environment.

Everyone's talking about how much food Americans eat, but we hear less about how much food they don't. In the United States, we throw out about 40 percent of our food every year. In fact, the amount of global food waste produced each year is more than enough to feed the nearly 1 billion hungry people in the world. Instead of filling empty plates, that wasted food usually ends up in landfills and eventually turns into a destructive greenhouse gas called methane. What's more, wasting food means squandering the resources (like water and energy) that went into the production of that food. Luckily there are many easy ways to be more careful about our consumption and reduce the amount of food waste we produce on a daily basis.

Make a Plan - Most of us know not to hit the supermarket hungry (Five bags of Doritos? Totally necessary.), but tackling the aisles with a list can also prevent us from loading up the cart with items we're just going to end up throwing away. The best idea is to plan the week's meals in advance, figure out what ingredients are required for each, and write them all down on a list. As long as you actually stick to the meal plan, there shouldn't be much food left over!

Keep track of the trash - Most of us know not to hit the supermarket hungry (Five bags of Doritos? Totally necessary.), but tackling the aisles with a list can also prevent us from loading up the cart with items we're just going to end up throwing away. The best idea is to plan the week's meals in advance, figure out what ingredients are required for each, and write them all down on a list. As long as you actually stick to the meal plan, there shouldn't be much food left over!

Donate to food kitchens - If you haven't yet tailored your weekly food purchases to your eating habits (see numbers 1 and 2), think twice before trashing all that grub. Unfortunately there are individuals and families in need all over the country who would really appreciate the head of lettuce you were just about to toss. Start by finding a local food bank and asking what kinds of food donations they accept.

Understand expiration dates - It's important to understand what expiration dates on food products actually mean, so that you don't end up throwing away a perfectly good loaf of bread. Expiration dates actually refer to the product's quality, not safety. And there's a difference between the "sell-by" label (the deadline for retailers to sell the product) and "use-by" (the date when the product starts to lose its quality and flavor.) There are a bunch of techniques you can use to extend the shelf life of everything in your kitchen, like keeping the fridge and freezer cool enough and unpacking groceries as soon as you get home from the store.

Learn to love leftovers - Few people want to eat the same thing for dinner five nights in a row, but throwing away the remainders of last night's meal just to avoid boredom isn't the most eco-friendly option. Instead, try getting creative in the kitchen and experiment with new dishes you can make using whatever's still hanging around. Or freeze leftovers so you can eat them down the road.

Create a compost pile - Even those who don't live on a farm or in a house with a backyard can do the eco-friendly thing with their trash. Composting means recycling nutrients back into the ecosystem, which keeps food out of landfills and waterways and enriches the soil. Some communities have local composting

programs, so ask around to find out how to get involved with yours. Or start your own compost indoors. (It's possible to do it in a way that doesn't stink; we promise.)

Take it home - As restaurant portion sizes get larger and larger, it's getting harder and harder for some of us to lick our plates clean. Impress fellow dinner guests with how eco-savvy you are and come prepared with a container for taking home whatever you don't finish. (Otherwise, the restaurant is probably just going to throw away your leftovers.) Bonus: That's one more meal you don't have to cook this week.

Use a smaller plate - When dining from a buffet, it can be tempting to load up on absolutely everything, even if we know we can't reasonably eat it all. Avoid temptation by starting with a smaller plate that fits less food, and trick your brain into thinking you've gotten your money's worth.

Grow a green thumb - As the price of supermarket produce continues to increase, more and more Americans are taking matters into their own hands and learning to grow their own food. The practice has a number of benefits: Perhaps most significantly, it reduces the use of fossil fuels involved in transporting produce all over the world. Those who grow their food without pesticides and herbicides also save the planet from extra air and water pollution. While cultivating a backyard garden might be ideal, even apartment residents can start by growing herbs on a windowsill and creating a compost pile.

Join the community - Community Supported Agriculture is a great way to bring farm-fresh ingredients directly to consumers. Participants sign up for a share, and every week, they pick up a box filled with local, seasonal food from a nearby farm(s). It's delicious, nutritious, and sustainable, so see if there's a CSA near you.

Information obtained from:

<https://greatist.com/happiness/ways-help-environment>