11 practical ways you can reduce food waste and save money

Food waste is a worldwide epidemic, and its well past time the average person started fighting back.

More than <u>one-third of all food</u> produced globally is wasted or spoiled. Americans throw away up to 40% of the food they buy, and organic matter in landfills provides <u>20% of all methane emissions</u>, a potent greenhouse gas that contributes considerably to <u>climate change</u>.

And yet in 2013, <u>49.1 million Americans</u> lived without sufficient access to safe and nutritious food.

"There are three main factors: abundance, beauty and cost," says Jonathan Bloom, author, activist and creator of *<u>Wasted Food</u>*.

The overall food supply is far too abundant — about twice the necessary amount per person, he says — and we want that food to look perfect, with the "right" shapes sizes and colors.

"Food prices have certainly been rising for the last five years, but when you look at our household spending that goes toward food, no other nation spends less on its food supply. We simply don't value things we don't spend much on," Bloom says. We're very careful about getting deals and discounts at grocery stores and at big-box retailers like Costco, but those values don't mean anything when half of that food goes in the trash."

Becoming more connected to your food will help you avoid waste," Bloom says. Whether you grow your own food you're simply more conscious while you shop and cook, you're less likely to waste.

We talked to Bloom about the various ways the average person can "connect" more with their food and food supply. Check out the extremely easy and practical tips below.

1. Shop smart and realistically.

It sounds simple, but this is one of the most important things you can do. When you go food shopping, make sure you don't buy too much food. This may mean going to the grocery store more often and buying less food each time. If you live far away from the store or you hate shopping, you should be thoughtful and careful about what you purchase.

"Plan out your meals and make a detailed shopping list with the ingredients you'll need, and when you're in the store really stick to that list," Bloom says. He admits that's easier said than done but being disciplined is helpful.

You should also try to purchase locally sourced produce and other food from places like your local farmer's market.

2. When cooking, don't over-serve food.

The idea of massive portions is partly driven by restaurant culture, but it's started to trickle into our homes, Bloom says. Fight against that, and don't over-serve friends and family when you're cooking meals. Using small plates can help with that.

3. Save – and actually eat – leftovers.

In the same vein, make sure you save uneaten food when you either cook too much or you get too much food at a restaurant. Label your leftovers so you can keep track of how long they've been in your fridge or freezer and incorporate them into your daily or weekly routine.

4. Store food in the right places.

"Storing food in the right place is really underrated," Bloom says. "It's often surprising what kinds of fruits and vegetables want to be at room temperature versus in the refrigerator."

Food Republic has a <u>fantastic infographic</u> to help you pinpoint where your various foods should go, while Heart.org <u>breaks down</u> where to put your fruits and veggies to make them last longer.

5. Avoid clutter in your fridge, pantry and freezer.

Bloom says out of sight is out of mind when it comes to storing food, too. If we forget something's there until it's no longer good to consume, that's a huge waste. Keep things neat and visible, and use the "first in, first out" principle: After you buy new groceries, move the older products to the front so you consume them first.

Also remember that things don't last forever in your freezer. Freezing can be a great asset in extending food's lifespan, but it will eventually dry that food out.

6. Treat expiration and sell-by dates as guidelines.

When it comes to expiration and sell-by dates, Bloom recommends not paying much attention to them, as they identify food quality, not food safety.

"Trust your senses instead of the date on the package. Trust your sense of smell and sight and taste," he says.

7. Keep track of what you throw away.

Manage a waste log to keep an eye on what you're throwing out, so you can prevent doing the same in the future. Bloom even suggests adding dollar signs to each thing you throw away. "That tends to get our attention," he laughs.

The other side is to keep track of what's already in your fridge before you go shopping; that way, you won't double-up on products and fail to use them before they go bad. As obvious as that sounds, we all forget to do it from time to time.

8. Donate to food banks and farms.

Before you throw away excess food, look into food banks and charities where you can bring items you know you're not going to consume before they go bad, and give them to people in need. You can find local food banks through Feeding America and WhyHunger.

You can also donate scraps and other types of food to farms and companies to feed livestock.

9. Try canning and pickling.

Canning is a great way to preserve food (especially fruit) and increase its shelf life for months.

10. Use helpful apps and gadgets.

There are various tools and apps that aim to help people avoid food waste. PareUp gives discounts to New Yorkers who buy excess food at local businesses and restaurants. Handpick helps you plan meals around ingredients you already have. Ample Harvest points gardeners to food pantries where they can donate excess food, and Food Cowboy makes it easy for wholesalers and truckers to find charities where they can donate unsold food.

There's even a small gadget called the Green Heart raising funds on Kickstarter, which contains a small packet of potassium crystals that absorb the gas fruit release when they ripen. The creators say fruit can last up to three days longer.

But don't assume these tools will do all the work -- it's all still up to us.

"No app is going to have as large an impact as us paying more attention to our food consumption habits, but I'm certainly all for any kind of help in getting people to change their ways," Bloom says.

11. Try composting, but don't focus on it.

Rather than discarding scraps, you can compost certain foods and turn it into nutrient-rich fertilizer.

But composting shouldn't be top-of-mind when first getting started on reducing food waste. The EPA has a food recovery hierarchy on how we use our food, stating first that we should reduce the waste we create, then donate food, try to feed livestock, use waste for industrial energy and *then* compost.

Bloom says composting is really valuable -- it's part of the whole equation -- but it shouldn't be anyone's priority.

"It's a nice safety net to keep food out of the landfill, because we're never going to completely eliminate food waste. We're always going to have some excess food, so having a process for that ... is a nice solution," he says.

REFERENCE

https://mashable.com/2015/02/15/food-waste-tips/