



# What do I waste?

A wasted food inventory

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## About This Inventory

Nearly half of the food that goes to waste in the U.S. each year – that’s over 42 million tons! – is wasted at home. That means **you** can play a big role in reducing food waste, keeping good food out of landfills, and ensuring food is used to feed people wherever possible.

You can use our “Wasted Food Inventory” tool to help you figure out how much, what, and why you waste and inspire habit change in the areas you need it!

## About Spoonfuls

Spoonfuls is a food recovery organization committed to delivering food with purpose. Through food recovery and distribution, education, and advocacy, we work to address the health, environmental, and economic impact that wasted food has on people and the planet.

# Instructions

1. Over the course of a single week, keep track of the food you toss! You can use the following page as a place to jot your findings or keep a list of your own.
2. Reflect on why this food was ultimately wasted (i.e. because you didn't get to it in time, you needed room in the fridge, you weren't sure if it was still good, etc.).
3. Once the week is up, turn to page 5 and consider what small (but important) changes you can make now to waste less in your home!
4. Tell others what you're up to and encourage them to join you.

Questions?  
[communityrelations@spoonfuls.org](mailto:communityrelations@spoonfuls.org).



# Now what?

## Identify patterns and themes

Understanding *why* you waste *what* you do can help you identify room for improvement! Some questions to consider:

- Is there a day during which more food was wasted than other days? How come?
- Is there an item or category of food (like veggies) that was wasted more than once this week? Why?
- Think about your food preparation this week. Did you cook more or less than usual? Eat out and come home with leftovers? How did this impact what you wasted?
- Did you throw away anything because the date on its label had passed? Are you confident it was no longer good to eat?
- Think back to buying that food. Did you buy more than you could use because it was on sale (think: impulse buy)? Had you checked your fridge/pantry before going to the store to see what you already had on hand?
- Was there a meal you cooked that was the source of a lot of wasted food? (Example: You made a big pot of soup and discarded most of it.) What can you do differently next time?

## Make a commitment

Identify 1-3 small changes you can make, starting right now, to address the reasons you waste food! Think: If takeout is the thing you mostly toss, commit to sharing meals. Or: If you're prone to impulse buys at the grocery store, commit to making a shopping list and sticking to it. More bright ideas below!

## Need extra motivation: Consider the cost

Of course there's the environmental impact (food left to rot in landfills contributes to the climate emergency). Also, though, there's the *actual cost*. That food was worth something - never mind the many resources it took to get it from farm to fridge (or pantry) in the first place! Wasted food is a waste of money, too. Tally up your Column D and consider what else you might have done with the money you spent on food that was wasted.

**Tag us on social media @spoonfulsfoodrecovery**  
to let us know how you're changing your habits!

# Ideas

## If you wasted leftovers

- Eat leftovers as-is or make them into something new.
- Freeze leftovers you know you won't eat before they go bad.
- Have "leftovers" nights to help use up odds and ends from the week (for example: soup made with leftover chicken and rice, or enchiladas filled and topped with the leftovers from taco night).
- [Find recipes and ideas for using your leftovers here.](#)
- Get extra creative with food scraps that are typically considered waste, like banana peels, which can be roasted, pureed, and more, to further reduce your wasted food footprint. We like [these tips](#) for cooking with "scraps."

## If you tossed food that was close- or past-dated

- Don't toss food just because the date on the label has passed. Remember that most date labels are a manufacturer's suggestions for peak quality and don't relate to the safety of the food. (Baby formula is the exception!)
- Use senses, like sight and smell, to know if food is safe to eat. If it smells and looks ok (think free of mold), it's probably still good! Remember that bruising and wilting alone aren't reasons to toss fruits and veggies.
- Learn more about the issue of food date label confusion by reading [our blog about it](#).

## If you buy too much or buy things you don't eat

- Make an effort to use food in your pantry and kitchen before buying new food.
- Make a shopping list after checking what you have on hand first.
- Stick to your shopping list while at the store.
- Don't shop on an empty stomach, if you can help it.
- [Check out these tips](#) for changing your shopping habits to reduce wasted food.

## If food spoiled before you got to it

- Make a meal plan for the week using what you have before making something new – and use foods with shorter shelf lives first (think: produce, meat, and dairy), so that it's eaten before it goes bad.
- Consider buying smaller amounts of items with short shelf lives. Perhaps one pound of fish for that meal would have been enough? Or one head of lettuce for the week instead of two?
- Learn some tips from the Spoonfuls team on meal planning to reduce waste [here](#).



**Delivering Food With Purpose**



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