

Eco-Tip for 3/19/17

Reducing Food Waste

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Do you throw away food when it reaches the “expiration” date printed on the package? Food industry groups recently adopted labeling standards phasing in terms better than “expiration.” By next year, most food will say either “use by” or “best if used by.” The former will indicate potential problems if kept longer, and the latter will indicate minor concerns such as flavor.

This effort follows last year’s “Spoiler Alert!” article in *Consumer Reports*, publicizing U.S. Department of Agriculture data showing American consumers discard 43% of the food brought into homes, costing the average family of four \$1,500 per year.

The opposite of wasting is preserving, and the term “preserving” food usually refers to freezing, drying, pickling, canning, or vacuum sealing. However, even consumers without the equipment needed to use these methods can take steps to avoid waste. The simplest step is to stay organized. Run your refrigerator like a business, with a first-in-first-out inventory control system.

WIKIHOW.com has an illustrated guide with more ideas to avoid food spoilage. For example, place dairy products on a top refrigerator shelf; the door space is too warm and should be used only for condiments. Store meat on the bottom shelf, the refrigerator’s coldest zone.

Also, separate fruits from vegetables, and use a higher humidity setting for vegetables; wash fruit only right before eating (not before storage); and clean shelves to prevent mold.

More information:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Reduce-Food-Spoilage>