

# At-Home Food Waste Activity



In this activity, you will learn about the problem of food waste, conduct a food waste audit in your own home, and learn about ways to reduce food waste.

## Did you know?

- 40% of all food produced in the United States is never eaten.
- When food is wasted, so is all the water, fuel, land, money, labor, and love that went into growing, transporting, processing, and preparing the food.
- Food waste occurs at all stages of the process from “farm to fork,” but the majority of food (43%) is wasted by households.
- 1 out of 7 Americans is food insecure.
- Project Drawdown ranks reducing food waste as the #3 solution for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

Learn more about the problem of food waste with these videos:

- [Life of a Strawberry](#) (It's Fresh!, 1:10 min)
- [Kids Go Green: Reducing Food Waste](#) (PBS, 1:54 min, grades K-5)
- [Kids Go Undercover to Discover Food Waste in their Homes](#) (SheKnows, 3:30 min)



## At-Home Food Waste Audit

When we throw food waste in the trash, it's hard to know how much and what kinds of food we throw away. A food waste audit shows you how much food waste you make, which can help you figure out the best ways to reduce it.

### Materials needed:

- A large measuring cup or a food storage container that shows its volume (check the bottom for the number of cups the container can hold)
- A lidded food storage container (or more than one) for storing one day's worth of food waste/scrap
- Data table (see below). If you don't have a printer at home, you can use a pencil to create the data table on your own paper.
- Camera (optional)

### Steps:

1. Collect your family's food waste each day for 3-5 days. The days do not need to be in a row.
2. Starting in the morning, place all the wasted food/food scraps in the container from the entire day (instead of putting them in the trash). Be sure to include:
  - Food preparation scraps/inedible parts of foods, such as carrot peels, melon rinds, banana peels, apple cores, tea leaves, coffee grounds, egg shells, etc. This type of food waste is unavoidable.
  - Food scraps from unfinished meals (plate waste)
  - Food that went bad or just wasn't wanted
3. At the end of the day or the next morning, measure the volume (number of cups) of food waste from the entire day and record it in the data table.
4. List the types of foods that you collected (for example: 2 banana peels, coffee grounds, plate waste from spaghetti dinner, old potato salad, 4 egg shells, etc)
5. Optional: Take a photo of each day's total food waste.
6. Discard the food waste after you record your data.
7. Wash your hands after handling the food scraps.
8. Repeat for 3-5 days.



## At-Home Food Waste Audit Data Table

Date	Volume of food waste (cups)	List/describe the types of food waste collected	Notes
5/2/2020 (example)	25 cups	Rind of 1 watermelon, 2 banana peels, coffee grounds, plate waste from spaghetti dinner, old potato salad, 4 egg shells, 3 slices moldy bread, 1 mushy banana	Most of today's waste was inedible fruit scraps, but some items we let go bad which could have been avoided.

## Think about it

1. How did you feel about the amount and kinds of food waste your family produced? Did your family produce more or less food waste than you expected?

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2. How could your family have prevented some of the food waste you measured?

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## Ways to take action

What can you do to reduce food waste at home? Take steps to prevent it and compost all the rest!

### Prevent wasted food

The best way to reduce food waste is to prevent wasting it in the first place.

Here are some strategies to avoid wasting food at home:

- Take what you'll eat and eat what you take at meal and snack times.
- Before heading to the grocery store, plan a menu and make a list so you buy what you need and don't purchase more food than you can eat before it spoils.
- Check what food you already have before you go grocery shopping.
- Get creative with your cooking by making meals with ingredients you already have. For example, make a vegetable soup of remaining parts of vegetables.
- Learn what food date labels mean (the difference between "best by" and "sell by," for example). See the USDA's [website](#) on food product dating to learn more.
- Use reusable containers for lunches and snacks on the go to make it easy to bring home uneaten food.
- Label your leftovers with the date when you store them in the fridge so you can keep track of how old they are.



Visit [www.savethefood.com](http://www.savethefood.com) to learn more tips to prevent wasting food at home.

Describe two food waste prevention strategies you want to try with your family:

1.

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2.

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### Compost food scraps

Composting is a way of recycling food scraps. Decomposition happens all on its own in nature when soil organisms like bacteria, fungi, and worms eat organic materials and turn them into a dark, crumbly, earthy-smelling soil. When we compost, we speed up this process by making ideal conditions for the soil organisms. Composting has lots of benefits, including reducing greenhouse gases and improving soil health. And it's fun!

Learn more about composting and the connection between composting, soil health, and climate change by watching [The Compost Story video](#) (Kiss the Ground, 6:46 min).

There are a number of ways to compost:

### Backyard composting

- For this type of composting, you need an outdoor bin that you can make yourself or purchase.
- What can be composted in a backyard bin? Fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds, as well as landscape trimmings and dry leaves. No meat, bones, or dairy should be added to a backyard bin.
- Learn more about [Home Composting](#) from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.



### Vermicomposting

- No backyard? Vermicomposting is a way to compost indoors using a worm bin.
- What do I need? Build your own worm bin using a large plastic tub with a lid. You'll also need to buy red wiggler worms.
- What can be composted in a worm bin? Fruit and vegetable scraps (without oils or dressing) and newspaper.



- Learn more by visiting [North Carolina Extension's Vermicomposting for Households](#).

### Commercial composting

- With commercial composting, the food scraps are collected from your house and taken to a composting facility.
- What can be composted? ALL food scraps can be composted including fruit, vegetable, meat, bones, dairy, and grains.
- How can I get commercial composting service?
  - Some cities offer curbside compost pick-up service. Visit your city's public works website to find out if this kind of service is available in your area.
  - Another option is to subscribe to an independent compost hauling service. There are several small companies in the Chicago region that provide a bucket exchange service weekly or every other week.
  - Visit the [Illinois Food Scrap Coalition](#) to find a commercial compost hauler near you.



Which type of composting do you think would work best for your family and why?

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**Food waste is a solvable problem. Thank you for being part of the solution!**