

**The Post Rock Connection**  
**Post Rock Extension District #1 Family and Consumer Sciences Column**  
**Month of October 2024**  
**By Jamie Rathbun, Family and Community Wellness Agent**

**Eating Right and Reducing Food Waste**

People rarely talk about the foods they toss out, yet the topic of food waste is getting a lot more attention these days. It has been estimated that Americans throw away billions of pounds of food each year either at home or when eating out. And that amount doesn't even include the food that goes uneaten at the grocery store.

Not all food that is wasted can be saved and eaten, but it has been proven that a lot of food waste could be prevented, especially at home. A good place to start is right in your own kitchen. Here are a few tips.

*Plan Meals Based on the Foods You Already Have on Hand*

- Look in the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry for foods that need to be used up.
- Buy only the amount of perishable foods that can be eaten or frozen within a few days. This is especially true for foods like fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, dairy products, and seafood.

*Makeover Your Leftovers*

Food tossed is money lost. One way to add new life to still edible foods is to re-purpose leftovers in new ways and new recipes.

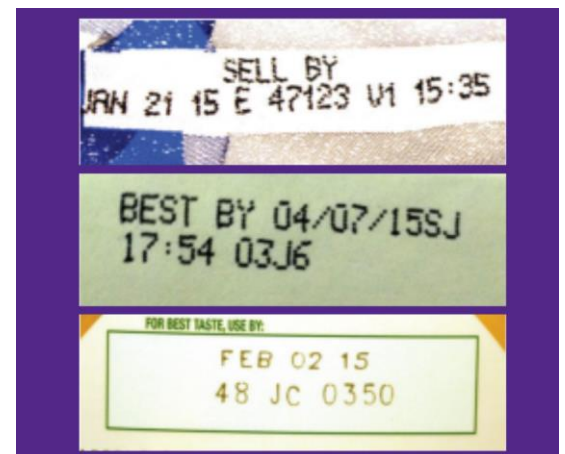
- Refrigerate ripe bananas to make them last a few days longer. They may be brown on the outside, but remain a good color on the inside.
- Freeze washed, peeled, bite-sized pieces of fruit for smoothies. Place on a baking sheet with sides and cover with plastic wrap. Transfer frozen pieces to freezer bags. Toss into smoothies.
- Use leftover meat in flavorful foods such as barbecued meat dishes, chili, and tacos to mask any flavor of "warmed over meat." Plus, being covered by a sauce or liquid helps prevent further flavor changes.

- Freeze chopped, mature onions by adding directly to a freezer bag. Lay flat to freeze. To separate the onions before use, give the bag a slight “whap” on the kitchen counter.
- Freeze extra bell peppers in shapes needed for recipes. Freeze for a few hours on a baking sheet with sides until hard. Transfer to freezer bag.
- Freeze extra tomato paste in tablespoon-sized portions in an ice cube tray. Transfer to a freezer bag  
Adding a tablespoon or two of tomato paste to soups, casseroles, and pasta sauce enhances the flavor of these foods with its concentrated, almost meaty, taste.
- Place that little bit of leftover vegetable in a container in the freezer. Add more small bits of leftovers as they are available. Use these in your next vegetable soup or stew.
- Use vanilla and fruit flavored yogurts as a dressing for fruit salad.
- Use up extra odds and ends of cheese by shredding them. Mix in your choice of ingredients, cut or chopped into small pieces (i.e. olives, pickles, pimentos, chives, walnuts, peppers, etc.) Add enough mayonnaise (regular or low-fat) to bind the ingredients together. Spread on your favorite bread.
- Make a chopped salad with small amounts of extra fruits, vegetables, nuts, cooked eggs, etc.
- Use that small amount of leftover meat sauce from spaghetti as the sauce and meat on homemade pizza.

### *Master the Shelf Life of Foods*

Many foods and drinks purchased at the grocery store include a date, which indicates when it should be used or sold by. Because these dates refer to the product’s quality, it doesn’t necessarily mean they should be thrown out.

- “Use by,” “Best by,” and “Best before” dates are found on foods, such as mustard, salad dressing, and ketchup. In many cases, they are safe to eat beyond the date as long as they have been stored properly.
- “Sell by” dates are displayed on perishable foods, such as meats and dairy products. It’s possible these foods may be used a few days after that date, as long as they were stored at a safe temperature.



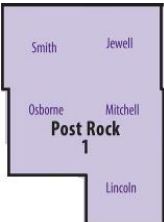
*Practice Good Food Safety*

- Don't risk eating or drinking anything that you suspect has spoiled.
- Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days (or freeze for up to 3 to 4 months).
- Store foods in the pantry so that products with closer dates are up front.
- Place foods that could spoil quickly within sight, such as in the front of the refrigerator or on the counter (if they're not perishable). Wait to wash produce until right before serving.
- Learn how to best store produce. Some produce will cause other fruits and vegetables to ripen quickly, so they need to be separated. And others should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place.

Storage location	Fruits and melons	Vegetables	
Store in refrigerator (<40°F)	Apples (>7 days) Apricots Berries Cherries Cut fruits Grapes	Herbs Mushrooms Green beans Beets Broccoli Cabbage	Carrots Cauliflower Cut veggies Leafy greens Summer squash Sweet corn
Ripen on the counter, then store in refrigerator	Peaches, Pears		
Store at room temperature	Apples (<7 days) Citrus fruits Watermelon	Bananas Muskmelon	Basil (in water) Cucumbers + Dry onions* Eggplant + Garlic* Winter Squash
			Peppers + Potatoes * Pumpkins Sweet potatoes* Tomatoes

+ Cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers can be kept refrigerated for 1 to 3 days if they are used soon after removal from the refrigerator.  
\*Store garlic, onions, potatoes, and sweet potatoes in a well-ventilated area in the pantry.

*The Post Rock District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith Counties. Contact Jamie Rathbun at [jrathbun@ksu.edu](mailto:jrathbun@ksu.edu) or by calling 785-524-4432. Stay connected with “Post Rock Extension” on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Our website is [www.postrock.ksu.edu](http://www.postrock.ksu.edu).*



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