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MOST of us think nothing of throwing out the crusts from each loaf of bread, scraping leftovers into the bin and routinely scooping bags of soggy salad leaves and decomposing cucumbers out of the fridge.

Yet the average household could save £160 a year by hitting The Mail on Sunday's 30 per cent food waste reduction target. That's just 1kg (2.2lb) a week – the same as three slices of bread, two apples, one glass of milk, a portion of leftovers such as shepherd's pie and two sausages. A family with children can save £210 a year on average by hitting the 30 per cent target.

So what are the secrets to slashing your food waste? For the answers, The Mail on Sunday turned to Britain's top expert on household food waste – Helen White, the special adviser for environmental charity WRAP.

'It starts with a shift in your mind set,' she says. 'Whether you're doing a shop or ordering a meal at a restaurant, every food-based decision is an opportunity to save food from the bin.'

'It might be as simple as checking what you've got in the fridge that needs to be eaten before heading to the shops, asking the waitress to hold back on the salad garnish, or measuring out portion sizes of rice, pasta or potatoes before you cook them.'

'There's so much to be gained if we make a point of enjoying every mouthful and making the most of every meal.'

Here are Helen's savviest – and safest – tips and tricks to wage war on the food waste in your home.

FIRST STEP: DO A FOOD AUDIT TO PLAN AHEAD

Don't even think about shopping for any food until you've completed a thorough audit of what's lurking in the back of your fridge, freezer and kitchen cupboards. You might find you can save money immediately by holding back on the weekly shop and planning a few meals from the food you've already got.

FRIDGE

- Start by emptying your fridge and cleaning it.
- Throw away anything that is long past its 'Use by' date, is obviously mouldy or beginning to decay.
- Make a note of any foods getting close to their 'Use by' date and add them to this week's meal planner.
- Return items to the fridge with those nearing their 'Use by' date prominently positioned near the front.
- Store ready-to-eat food and dairy products on the top/middle, raw meat/fish on the bottom, and fruit and veg in the salad drawers to maximise life.
- Check your fridge is running at 5C or below (the average fridge is set at 7C, which makes chilled food more likely to go off quickly). See lovefoodhatewaste.com/article/chill-fridge-out for details on how to set the thermostat in your fridge (usually set the dial between 3 and 4) and consider investing in a fridge thermometer (£3.99 from lakeland.co.uk).

FREEZER

- Routinely empty your freezer and defrost it – this ensures it is operating effectively, and could free up quite a bit of space.
- Throw away anything you don't recognise, or which has clearly been entombed for far too long.
- Make a list of the contents and add them to this week's meal planner – you can start defrosting straight away.
- Always defrost your food fully in the fridge, and never defrost at room temperature.
- Create a freezer contents log on your smart phone to keep track of contents to use while shopping.
- Make sure everything you freeze is clearly labelled with the date on which you froze the food, to avoid 'Unidentified Frozen Objects'.



CUPBOARDS

- As a matter of routine, empty food cupboards and clean the shelves.
- Discard anything that has clearly gone bad.
- Add a selection of all that remain to this week's meal planner.
- Return tins and packets in logical order, with the closest to their 'Best before' dates nearest the front.

RUBBISH BIN

Make a list of the foods that most often get scraped or tipped into

your food bin. Can you see patterns forming? Are you repeatedly buying foods that don't get eaten? Can you sneak anything into the freezer before it goes off? Remember, you can freeze meat and fish any time before its 'Use by' date.

'Ignore any packaging that says "freeze on the day of purchase",' Helen says. 'There is no safety reason for these labels and they just encourage people to throw away good food.'

SECOND STEP: BUY WHAT YOU NEED

Now you've compiled an extensive list of food in your fridge, freezer and kitchen cupboards, you are ready to start planning meals for the week ahead. Check your diary and consider quick meals for when time is tight and possible recipes that use up leftovers for evenings when you've got a bit more time.

Write a clear (short) shopping list of the food you know you're going to need and make a promise to yourself not to buy any more than strictly necessary. Keep in mind the UK's top three most wasted foods: potato, bread and milk. Do you really need more? If the chil-

dren can't stand kale, is there any point in continuing to buy it?

Helen says: 'If you have children, get them involved in meal planning and shopping – they're less likely to refuse foods or meals if they've had a hand in selecting them. You'll also minimise waste if you allow the children to serve them-

selves at meal times (it means that any remaining food can be chilled and eaten later).'

Check the 'Use by' date of anything before you put it in your trolley to make sure it will last long enough to be eaten. Never be seduced by a buy-one-get-one-free offer with short 'Use by'

Freeze your cheese, keep herbs in a glass of water – but never put bread in the fridge!

The definitive guide to making everything you buy last as long as humanly possible

6 ways to make roast chicken last all week

CHICKEN is the nation's favourite meat, but according to WRAP, we're wasting meat from 120 million birds every year. Buying and roasting a whole chicken will save money compared to buying separate breast or leg joints. Breast meat can be sliced and refrigerated for sandwiches, and you can pick over the rest of the joint for meat, which can be used in

salads or sandwiches and thrown into a curry, soups or stews. Use the carcass for stock (simmer with veggies, herbs and water).





trays to throw into sauces and stews later.

- Excess cooked pasta or rice can be frozen in portions.
- Tuck a piece of kitchen roll in with bagged lettuce or spinach to absorb excess moisture and seal with a clip (you can also add leftover lettuce to soups).
- Chop excess herbs finely and put into ice cube trays covered with a little water, then freeze.
- Chop and cook wrinkly apples into apple sauce, then freeze in batches to defrost when you're cooking roast pork or you need to whip up a crumble in a hurry.
- Scoop out the seeds from butternut squash, wash and dry, then toss in olive oil and salt and toast them in the oven.
- Sauté vegetable scraps (tops, stalks, peels etc) in a little oil, then add water and simmer into an aromatic vegetable stock.

... BUT DON'T FREEZE

- Vegetables with a high water content, such as lettuce, cucumber, bean sprouts and radishes, will go limp and mushy.
- Egg-based sauces, such as mayonnaise, will separate and curdle.
- Plain yogurt, low-fat cream cheese, single cream and cottage cheese go watery.

WHAT TO KEEP OUT OF THE FRIDGE

- Most fresh produce is best kept in the fridge, where it'll stay fresh for longer. The main exceptions are bananas, onions, whole pineapples and potatoes.
- A whole pineapple can be kept in a cool place (not the fridge) but once it's chopped, store in the fridge or freezer.
- Store garlic, onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes and butternut squash in a cool, dark, dry space.
- Bread lasts six times longer OUT of the fridge in a cool, dark and dry place (clean your bread bin regularly to get rid of mould spores, which will latch on to fresh bread).
- You may have heard that tomatoes should be kept out of the fridge. Helen White says: 'It's a myth that the fridge will sap tomatoes of their flavour.' She recommends storing them in the fridge and bringing to room temperature in a bowl before eating.
- Similarly, move a few fruits at a time from the fridge into the fruit bowl to ripen them. Keep nectarines, peaches and plums in a paper bag on the counter until they are ripe, then move back to the fridge, where they'll last a few more days.

TRY 'COMPLEAT' EATING – AND DON'T WASTE STALKS

The skin and stalks of many types of fruit and vegetables are a source of nutrients and fibre, so aim to eat them rather than throwing them away. You get a nutritional bonus, too, from cooking and mashing potatoes still in their skins, scrubbing carrots rather than peeling them, chopping up the green bits off leeks and spring onions as well as the white, and eating the stalks of broccoli and cauliflower along with the florets.

Apple skin, for instance, contains vitamins, minerals and antioxidants called triterpenoids which are believed to have cancer-fighting properties.

dates – unless you're sure you can eat (or you have room to freeze) everything in time.

IGNORE 'SELL BY' DATES AND TRUST YOUR NOSE

A 'Sell by' date informs retailers when to take something off the shelves and 'Best before' is merely a suggestion. Neither means the product is unsafe to eat.

The only label you need to take notice of is 'Use by', which tells you about food safety rather than food quality. You will see 'Use by' dates on food that goes off quickly, such as meat products or ready-to-eat salads. Don't eat, cook or freeze anything after the 'Use by' date as it could be unsafe to eat – even if it looks and smells fine.

'Best before' refers to quality rather than safety, so trust your senses instead: if it smells, looks and tastes OK, it probably is.

THIRD STEP: STORE ALL YOUR FOOD CORRECTLY

Now that you're home with bags full of carefully selected food, don't let all your hard work so far go to waste. The trick is to stick to your original meal planner as closely as possible. If you have to change tack – perhaps your husband or wife has to travel for work, for example – bear in mind what that means for the food in your fridge.

At this stage, there will be two major aids to helping you cut down on waste. First, store your food correctly.

Second, if you have leftover meals or bits and pieces of vegetables or meat, you need to find ways to use them in other dishes. In the coming weeks, The Mail on Sunday's You magazine will be packed full of brilliant recipes

How to get pasta portions right

OVER-generous portions and miscalculating the amount of rice, pasta and potatoes leads to quite a bit of bulky carbohydrate being scraped into the bin.
Cut your waste by

taking out the guesswork and only cooking exactly as much as you need:

RICE A quarter mug of uncooked rice per person (one mug of uncooked rice for four people).

PASTA Two cupped handfuls of dry pasta per person (70g).

OATS Three tablespoons (50g) per person.

SPAGHETTI For each person, make a £1-coin-sized circle between

thumb and finger and slot dried spaghetti through.

POTATOES Three egg-sized potatoes per person should be sufficient for boiled spuds. For chips and roasties, it's two pieces.

that use leftovers to create delicious dishes.

Here are Helen's craftiest tips to keep your food going for longer.

TRICKS TO KEEP IT FRESH

- Fresh herbs, asparagus and spring onions will last longer if you stand them in a glass or vase of water in the fridge door (change the water every few days) – and you can refresh a wilting cucumber by standing it in a glass of water in the fridge.
- Wrinkled fruit and brown bananas can be cut up and frozen in batches to put in smoothies.
- Jaded lemons can be cut into slices or wedges and frozen to drop straight into a G&T.
- Just before they get wrinkly and soft, cut up mushrooms, onions and peppers and freeze separately to throw into sauces and stews straight from frozen (if using only half a pepper at a time, the other half will stay fresher for longer if you keep stalk and seeds attached).

- Small pieces of cheese can be grated and frozen.
- Houmous can be frozen (but tzatziki can't).
- Leftover double cream can be whipped up and frozen in batches to put in sauces or mash (the whipping process helps the transition – don't freeze liquid cream).
- You can freshen up nuts by toasting them on a baking sheet for a few minutes.
- Slice up bread and freeze (can be toasted straight from the freezer, or make sandwiches from frozen to keep fillings cool).
- Freeze the crusty end slices of bread to use as bases for mini pizzas or for garlic bread. Or blitz them to create breadcrumbs to use for crumble or pasta bake toppings, stuffing or thickening sauces (freeze in batches and use straight from frozen).
- Freeze spare milk before it goes off (use small containers, defrost in the fridge overnight, shake well, then use within 24 hours).
- Freeze dregs of milk in ice cube

- trays ready to pop into a hot drink.
- Large punnets of mushrooms keep fresher for longer if you cover them with a tea towel and tuck in the sides like a blanket.
- Crack eggs close to their 'Best before' date into a freezer container and whisk briefly, labelling clearly the number of eggs or egg whites per container (can be defrosted and used in baking or omelettes). Don't try to freeze whole eggs.
- Save the stems of greens such as kale and the tops of beetroot and carrots with wilted herbs to throw into a nutritious green smoothie.
- Use lemon and orange peel, apple peel or cucumber ends to help bring flavour to chilled drinking water.
- Whole cherry tomatoes can be frozen and used straight from the freezer, or roast old tomatoes and store in the fridge, covered in oil.
- Soft cheese doesn't freeze well, so try stirring it into a pasta sauce and freezing it like that.
- Freeze leftover wine in ice cube

TELL US HOW YOU'LL CUT FOOD WASTE
Send your top tricks to foodwaste@mailonsunday.co.uk