Food Storage Tips

Tips for storing food so that it lasts longer and gets wasted less.

Why worry about preventing wasted food? Although composting is a great way to deal with inevitable food scraps like banana peels, it is much better to eat the food we can than to compost it. Prevention helps the environment as well as our budgets. After all, it takes a lot of resources to get food from the fields to our homes.

While no one buys food with the intention of throwing it away, based on recent estimates, the average household in Saint Paul wastes up to $96 worth of once edible food every month!

Storing your food properly can make it last much longer to help you save money and reduce waste. Eureka Recycling has assembled tips and tools to help on www.makedirtnotwaste.org. Try out a tip. Love it? Hate it? Have a better idea? Log in so you can rate it and leave a comment, or add one of your own.

General storage tips to keep in mind:

Keep apples, bananas, citrus, and tomatoes away from other produce— they give off ethylene gas that makes other produce ripen/deteriorate faster.

Untie all bunches (herbs, greens, etc.) to allow the produce to breathe.

The length of time that the food will last depends on how fresh it was when you bought it. Local, in-season produce will last much longer than something that has been shipped a long way. For all perishable food, use your nose and eyes to determine if it has gone bad. Sometimes, it may just be past its prime for raw eating but can be cooked— pears, apples, berries, or other fruit can be made into sauces, crisps, or cobblers. Stale bread can be kept for breadcrumbs, French toast, or bread pudding.

All frozen things should be in an airtight container with as much air removed as possible. Air contains moisture that creates ice crystals that “burn” the food or make it deteriorate faster. Freezing in a flat, rectangular, clear, glass container works so you can see your food and stack containers. Don’t forget to label when it went in the freezer!

Many of these foods can be dried in a food dehydrator or canned with a hot water bath canner or a pressure canner. Check out a dehydrating or a canning guide to find the best recipes for preserving large quantities of produce.

For best results, keep your fridge between 37° F and 40° F, and your freezer between 0° F and 2° F.

Use your fridge’s crisper drawer. The higher humidity environment benefits many vegetables by helping them last longer. If you can adjust the humidity setting on your crisper drawer, set it on high humidity for leafy greens or on low for non-leafy vegetables like carrots and cucumbers.
**Apples**

Store apples in the **fridge** to extend shelf life.

One bad apple can ruin the whole bunch, so eat up the bruised ones first!

For longer storage, store in a cardboard box covered with a damp towel.

**Artichokes**

Place in an **airtight container** with a damp towel for moisture and store in the **fridge**.

**Asparagus**

Store asparagus in the **fridge**.

- Trim the base of the stalks and place upright in a jar filled with an inch of water.
- Or, wrap the cut ends of the stalks in a moist paper towel or rag.

**Avocados**

To speed up ripening, place in a paper bag and place an apple in the bag with them.

Once ripe, store avocados in the **fridge**.

Mix avocados or guacamole with a little lemon or lime juice or leave the pit in to slow browning.

**Beans, cooked/canned**

Store unused cooked beans in the **fridge** in their liquid or water.

You can **freeze** cooked beans in liquid. Put cooked beans in a can/freeze jar and fill with cooking liquid or water.

**Beans, dry**

Store dry, uncooked beans in an **airtight container** in a cool, dry place.

**Beans, green**

Store unwashed green beans in the **fridge** in an **airtight container**. Wet beans will develop black spots and decay quickly.

Green beans can be **frozen**, either raw or blanched. Freeze on a cookie sheet in a single layer and transfer to an **airtight container**.

**Beets**

Store beets in the **fridge** (greens removed) in an **airtight container** with a paper towel inside to absorb moisture.

You can **freeze** beets by blanching them and storing in an airtight container.

Don’t forget to eat the beet greens! Check out “Greens, cooking” for more information on how to store them.

**Berries**

Before storing berries, remove any spoiled or crushed fruits, and store unwashed in an **airtight container**. Try not to put them into too many layers because berries are fragile.

Don’t wash until ready to eat—any added moisture encourages mold. If you must wash them, we have heard that adding a little white vinegar to the water helps keep them from deteriorating as quickly.

Store excess berries in the freezer in an **airtight container**. Freeze them on a cookie sheet first before transferring to a container to avoid sticking.

**Basil**

Basil is a warm weather crop and turns black quickly in the fridge. Store on the counter in a glass of water like a cut flower with the stem in the water, or wrapped in a dry paper towel in an **airtight container**.
Bitter melon
Store in an **airtight container** in the crisper drawer of the **fridge**.
Can be frozen if sautéed first. Store in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**.

Bread & Breadcrumbs
Store fresh bread wrapped in a cotton bag or wax paper in a bread box or metal tin on the **counter**.
To freshen up a day-old loaf, hold it very briefly under a running cold tap. Give it a good shake and pop it in a hot oven for about 10 minutes; it will be as soft and crusty as freshly baked bread.
Store sliced bread in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**. Thaw in the microwave or toaster.
Store stale bread, crusts, and crumbs in the **freezer** to use for making breadcrumbs. Store breadcrumbs in an **airtight container** in the **freezer**.

Broccoli
Store broccoli loosely in the **fridge**. You can wrap it in a damp towel or cotton bag.
The stalks can be eaten, too! Store the stalks in an **airtight container** with a paper towel. Peel and shred them to make a broccoli slaw or cut them and put them into soups.
Broccoli can be blanched and put in the **freezer** in an **airtight container**.

Brown sugar
Store brown sugar in an **airtight container**.
Try keeping a few marshmallows or a slice of bread on top of the sugar to keep it from drying out and getting hard. Or, a brown sugar “teddy bear” clay disc might be a good option to help keep your sugar from getting hard. Soak the disc in water for 15 minutes once or twice a year.

Butter
When storing butter in the **fridge**, don’t keep it in the door (often where the “Butter” compartment is) because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.
Butter can be stored in the **freezer**. Cut it into tablespoon-sized chunks and store in an **airtight container**.

Cabbage
Store cabbage in the crisper drawer of the **fridge**.
Peel off outer leaves if they start to wilt. Eat cabbage first as it goes bad more quickly than other produce.

Carrots
Cut the tops off carrots to keep them fresh longer.
Store carrots in the **fridge** either in a container of water or unwashed in an **airtight container** in the crisper drawer with plenty of moisture.
If you have a lot of carrots at the end of the season, store them in buckets of damp sand in a cool, dry place.

Cauliflower
Store cauliflower in an **airtight container** in the **fridge**, but eat cauliflower first as it goes bad more quickly than other produce.

Celery
Store celery in the **fridge** either in a container of water or in an **airtight container**.
Celery leaves can be washed, dried, and **frozen**, then crumbled into soups and stews for extra flavor.
Cereal
Store cereal in a dry place in an airtight container.

If cereals have gone a little soft or stale, lay them out on a cookie sheet and pop them in the oven for a bit to remove some of the excess moisture.

If you have several boxes of cereal but not enough in any one box to be worthwhile, mix them all together, blend them in a food processor, and use like breadcrumbs, as toppings for muffins or baked goods, or on ice cream!

Cheese
Store cheese in wax paper, butcher paper, or parchment paper to allow it to breathe and not get moldy. Store it in a cold part of your fridge.

Hard and semi-hard cheeses like Parmesan, cheddar, and Swiss can be grated or cubed and kept in the freezer. After being in the freezer, cheese is best used in cooking.

Soft and semi-soft cheeses do not freeze well.

Cherries
Store cherries in the fridge.

Don’t wash until ready to eat—any added moisture encourages mold. If you must wash them before storing, try using a mixture of one part white vinegar and ten parts water to help keep them from deteriorating as quickly.

Pitted and washed cherries can be stored in the freezer by laying them in a single layer on a cookie sheet, freezing them, and then transferring to an airtight container.

Citrus
(Includes grapefruit, lemons, limes, oranges, etc.)
Keep citrus loose or in an open container in the fridge. Never store citrus in an airtight container.

If you have a cut lemon or lime, wrap the cut end in a damp paper towel.

Juice and peels can be stored in the freezer. Freeze juice in ice cube trays and store peels in an airtight container in the freezer.

Juice from citrus can be used to keep apples, pears, and avocados from going brown.

Coconut milk
Coconut milk can be kept in the freezer. Freeze it in ice cube trays then transfer cubes to an airtight container.

Corn
Leave husks on fresh corn and store open in the fridge. Eat as soon as you can, as it loses flavor and texture quickly.

Buy corn when it’s in season and store it in the freezer by blanching, cutting from the cob, and transferring to an airtight container.

Cream
When storing cream in the fridge, don’t put it in the door, because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.

Cream can be frozen.
- Lightly whip the cream before freezing to prevent it from getting grainy.
- Freeze in ice cube trays then transfer cubes to an airtight container.

Cucumbers
Store cucumbers in the fridge by standing them upright in a container of water with the stalk down.

Wrap in a moist towel in the fridge.

Dates
The drier varieties of dates (like Deglet Noor) can be stored out on the counter in a bowl or paper bag.

The more moist variety of dates (like Medjool) need to be kept in the fridge either in cloth or in a paper bag, keeping the moisture away from the skin of the dates.
Eggs

When storing eggs in the fridge, write the date you bought them on the shells or cartons to make sure to use the older ones first.

To test if an egg is still good, try dropping one in a glass of water.
If the egg...

- stays at the bottom, flat or at an angle, it is fresh.
- stands on its pointed end at the bottom, it is still safe to eat but best used for baking and making hard-boiled eggs.
- floats, it’s stale and best discarded.

You can freeze eggs, just not in the shell. They are best if frozen in portions you will use, like in ice cube trays. If freezing whole eggs or yolks, whip up the yolk with a fork and put in tray. If freezing just yolks, to keep them from clumping, add a ½ tsp. of salt per cup of yolks or 1 tbsp. of sugar per cup of yolks. You can freeze whites as they are. Store portions in an airtight container.

Garlic

Store in a cool, dark place away from produce that gives off ethylene gas.

Try storing garlic in an old nylon stocking: place one head of garlic in the stocking, tie a knot, and add another, etc. When the stocking is filled, hang it in a cool, dark place.

Grapes

Remove spoiled or soft grapes and do not wash them before storing in the fridge in an airtight container.

Grapes can be frozen to use in smoothies or as a frozen treat. Freeze in a single layer on a cookie sheet, and then store the frozen grapes in an airtight container.

Greens, cooking

(Includes all greens generally eaten cooked: beet greens, bok choy, broccoli raab, collards, dandelion greens, kale, mustard greens, spinach, Swiss chard, tat soi, and turnip greens)

Remove any bands, twist ties, etc.

Greens must be kept in an airtight container with a damp cloth to keep them from drying out.

Hardier greens like kale, collards, and chard even do well with their stems in a cup of water on the counter or fridge.

Greens, salad

(Includes all greens eaten fresh: arugula, corn mache, endive, lettuce, mizuna, radicchio, sorrel, and spinach)

Store salad greens in the fridge in an airtight container with a damp paper towel.

Soak leaves that have gone limp for 30 minutes in cold water to revive crispness.
Green onions (or Scallions)

Store in the fridge wrapped in a damp towel or upright in a glass of water just to cover the white parts. Make sure to remove any bands on the bunch.

Green onions can be frozen to be used cooked later. Chop and freeze on a cookie sheet and store in an airtight container.

Melons

Store in a cool, dry place out of the sun.

Once ripe, store melons in the fridge.

Cubed melon can be frozen on trays before transferring to an airtight container, and then used in drinks and smoothies.

Herbs

Store herbs (other than basil) in the fridge upright in jars (stems down) filled with 1-2 inches of water.

Herbs can be frozen by chopping and freezing in ice cube trays full of olive oil.

Milk

When storing milk in the fridge, don’t put it in the door, because that is often warmer than other parts of the fridge, and could make it spoil more quickly.

Skim or low fat milk can be frozen in glass jars. It may be better used in baking than for drinking because it often separates. Be sure to leave room in the jar for the milk to expand.

Leeks

Store leeks in an open container in the crisper drawer of the fridge wrapped in a damp cloth or in a shallow cup of water (just so the very bottom of the leek is covered with water).

Nuts

Nuts can be stored in the freezer, fridge, or a cool, dry place. They will last longer in a colder place.

Nuts take on other flavors easily, so store away from high-odor foods.

Nut butters should be stored in the fridge to extend shelf life.

Meat, Poultry, and Fish

(Includes: bacon, beef, chicken, ham, pork, turkey)

Keep all meat in the coldest part of the fridge: the bottom shelf.

Fresh meat will only keep for 1-2 days in the fridge. If not using within 1-2 days, freeze in an airtight container.

Freeze individual portions or strips of bacon between wax paper and in an airtight container.

Keep raw meat, poultry, or fish in the freezer and thaw it out in the fridge a day or two before you will cook it.

Cooked meat can keep up to 4-5 days in the fridge.

Keep bones and carcasses to make soup or stock. Keep them in the freezer to use later.

Oils

Store oils in a cool, dark place in a glass, ceramic or non-reactive metal container (like stainless steel). Keep away from your stove or any warm place.

If you keep oil in a dark basement, you may want to keep a small, opaque container of oil in in your kitchen for easy access.
Okra

Okra doesn’t like humidity. Store with a dry towel in an airtight container. Eat as soon as you can after purchasing, as it doesn’t last as long as other produce.

Onions

Store whole onions in a cool, dark place somewhere slightly warmer than the fridge. Good air circulation is best, so don’t stack them.

Try storing onions in an old nylon stocking: place one in the stocking, tie a knot, and add another, etc. When the stocking is filled, hang it in a cool dark place.

Store partially used onions in the fridge in an airtight container, leaving the papery outer layer on.

Onions cause potatoes to sprout, so keep them separate.

Pasta

Store dry pasta in an airtight container.

Cooked pasta can be frozen in individual- or meal-sized portions.

Pears

Store pears in the fridge to extend shelf life.

Fruits that are overripe or damaged can still be used in sauces or baked goods if you do not want to freeze them. Look up recipes in your cookbooks or online.

Peas

Keep peas in the fridge in an airtight container.

Fresh peas (snap or shell) can be blanched and frozen in an airtight container. Freeze them on a cookie sheet first before transferring to a container to avoid sticking.

Peppers: red, green, or hot

Only wash peppers right before eating them.

Partially-eaten peppers can be stored in the fridge with the seeds and stems attached to extend shelf life.

Peppers can be frozen, either raw or blanched, to be used later for cooking.

Persimmon

Store at room temperature until ripe (Fuyu will still be firm, Hachiya will be mushy) and then store in the fridge.

To hasten the ripening process, place in a paper bag with a few apples. Don’t stack them, as they get very fragile when ripe.

Pomegranates

You can store pomegranates on a cool counter, but they will keep longer in an open container in the fridge.

Potatoes

Store potatoes in a cool, dark place somewhere slightly warmer than the fridge. A box in a dark corner of the pantry or a paper bag work well.

Moisture and exposure to light causes spoilage.

Onions cause potatoes to sprout. They’re still good to eat—just cut off the sprouts and eyes.

While apples cause most produce to spoil, apples can help keep potatoes from sprouting, so you may want to store them together in a cool place for long-term storage.

Cooked and mashed potatoes can be frozen to eat later.

Rhubarb

Wrap in a damp towel and place in an open container in the fridge.
Rice
Store dry rice in an **airtight container**.
Cooked rice can be **frozen** in an **airtight container**.

Root vegetables
(Includes celery root/celeriac, parsnips, radishes, rutabagas, turnips)
Remove any greens and store separately (see Greens, cooking). Greens from some root vegetables such as turnips and radishes are edible and delicious when cooked.
Store in a **cool, dark**, humid root cellar or in an **airtight container** with a damp towel in the **fridge**.

Squash
(Includes acorn, butternut, pumpkins, and all thick-skinned squash that are often categorized as “winter squash”)
Store in a **cool, dark, well ventilated place**. Many growers say winter squashes get sweeter if they’re stored for a week or so before eaten.

Stone fruit
(Includes peaches, plums, nectarines, and apricots. Cherries are exception: see “Cherries”)
Store in a cool place out of the sun until ripe.
Once ripe, store open in the **fridge**.
Stone fruit can be **frozen**— peeled or unpeeled. Cut and freeze on a cookie sheet then put in an **airtight container**.

Sweet potatoes
Store in a **cool, dark, well ventilated place**. Never refrigerate— sweet potatoes don’t like the cold.

Tomatoes
Tomatoes can be **frozen** either raw or cooked.
Tomatoes should be stored on the **counter** unless very ripe, at which point transfer them to the **fridge**.
Tomatoes give off ethylene gas that causes other produce to deteriorate, so store them separately.
To hasten ripeness, place them in a paper bag with an apple.

Zucchini
(Includes patty-pan, yellow squash, and all thin skinned squash varieties often categorized as “summer squash”)
Wrap whole or cut ends in a damp cloth and keep in the **fridge**.
Zucchini can be **frozen** either blanched or raw. Store in an **airtight container**.
Acorn squash ....................... 8
Apples ................................ 2
Apricots ............................. 8
Artichokes ......................... 2
Arugula ................................ 5
Asparagus ............................ 2
Avocados ........................... 2
Bacon .................................. 6
Bananas .............................. 2
Basil .................................... 2
Beans, cooked/canned .......... 2
Beans, dry ............................. 2
Beans, green ....................... 2
Beef ................................... 6
Beets .................................. 2
Beet greens .......................... 5
Berries ................................ 2
Bitter melon ......................... 3
Blueberries ......................... 2
Bok choy ............................. 5
Bread & Breadcrumbs ............ 3
Broccoli ............................. 3
Broccoli raab ...................... 5
Brown sugar ........................ 3
Brussels sprouts .................. 3
Butter .................................. 3
Butternut squash ................. 8
Cabbage ............................. 3
Cantaloupe ......................... 6
Carrots .............................. 3
Cauliflower ........................... 3
Celery .................................. 3
Celery root .......................... 8
Celeriac ................................ 8
Cereal ................................. 8
Cereals ............................... 8
Cereals, breakfast ............... 8
Cereal, breakfast .................. 8
Cherries ............................. 4
Cheesecake .......................... 4
Cheese ................................. 4
Chicken ............................... 6
Citrus .................................. 4
Collards .............................. 5
Coconut milk ....................... 4
Corn ..................................... 4
Corn mâché .......................... 5
Cream .................................. 4
Cucumbers ........................... 4
Dandelion greens ............... 5
Dates .................................... 4
Eggs ...................................... 5
Eggplant .............................. 5
Endive ................................ 5
Fennel ................................ 5
Figs ...................................... 5
Fish ..................................... 6
Flours ................................ 5
Garlic .................................. 5
Grapefruit ............................ 4
Grapes ................................ 5
Green onions ....................... 6
Greens, cooking ................. 5
Greens, salad ...................... 5
Ham ..................................... 6
Herbs ................................. 6
Kale ..................................... 5
Leeks .................................... 6
Lemons ................................ 4
Lettuce ................................ 5
Limes .................................... 4
Meat ..................................... 6
Melons ................................. 6
Milk ..................................... 6
Mizuna ................................. 5
Mushrooms ........................... 6
Mustard greens ................... 5
Nectarines ........................... 8
Nuts ..................................... 6
Oils ...................................... 6
Okra ..................................... 7
Onions ................................. 7
Oranges ............................... 4
Patty-pan squash .............. 8
Parsnips ............................. 8
Pasta ................................... 7
Peaches ............................... 8
Pears .................................... 7
Peas .................................... 7
Peppers: hot, sweet, bell ...... 7
Persimmon ......................... 7
Plums ................................ 8
Pomegranates ..................... 7
Pork .................................... 6
Potatoes ............................... 7
Poultry ................................. 6
Pumpkins ............................ 8
Radishes .............................. 8
Radicchio ............................ 5
Rhubarb ............................... 7
Rice ..................................... 8
Root vegetables ................. 8
Rutabagas ........................... 8
Scallions ............................. 6
Sorrel .................................. 5
Spinach ............................... 5
Squash, summer ................. 8
Squash, winter .................... 8
Stone fruit ............................ 8
Strawberries ....................... 2
Sweet potatoes .................... 8
Swiss chard ......................... 5
Tat soi .................................. 5
Tomatoes ............................. 8
Turkey .................................. 6
Turnips ............................... 8
Turnip greens ..................... 8
Watermelon ....................... 6
Yellow squash ..................... 8
Zucchini ............................. 8