



# Pick the Habit

Making the most of your food  
and reducing waste



We're all guilty of throwing away food from time-to-time, even though we know it's not the right thing to do. This leaflet is full of practical tips that, with time, can become really good food saving habits. You'll also find tasty savoury and sweet recipes that make the most of leftovers and food that is past its best, but still perfectly good to eat.

Food waste has serious consequences but the solutions to preventing it in our own homes are relatively easy. Just like perfecting a delicious dish or baking a scrumptious cake, it takes time and practice to swap our old habits for better ones.

So, read on and pick the habits that will work for your lifestyle and help you make the most of your food.





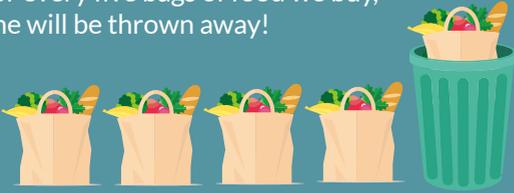
# The cost of food

We may not notice the true cost of the food we waste because it happens bit by bit - a pepper here, and a carton of milk there, mouldy bread last week. But, if you think about the cost over the course of the year, it can add up to quite a lot.

Getting food onto our plates has a massive environmental cost associated with it too. Energy and water are used to grow the food; it needs to be harvested; transported; stored in warehouses and possibly refrigerated; packaged; taken to shops/ supermarkets before being taken away by people who may well have driven there, and will put it into their fridge at home.

Of course, if some of that food goes to waste, there's also the cost to getting rid of what we throw away. These are costs we're not likely to notice, but they are part of every piece of food we eat and the food we throw away.

For every five bags of food we buy, one will be thrown away!



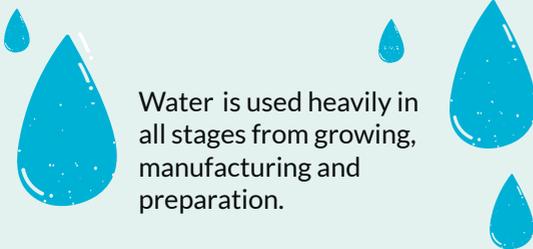
Large areas of the planet are heavily managed to raise livestock and grow crops.



The average family with children in the UK spends around £730 per year on food that will never be eaten; for an individual it's £210.



More than one meal is thrown away every day.



Water is used heavily in all stages from growing, manufacturing and preparation.

Through the chemicals we spray, the way we use land and types of things we grow, life on land, in water and in the air is affected by food production.

Oil and gas are used to power the production, transport, manufacturing, preparation, and disposal of food. If left to decompose in landfill, a powerful greenhouse gas called methane is released as the food rots.



# Planning shopping and meals

Some people love a plan; working out what they'll eat every day and then doing their shopping with that in mind. It is a great way to be sure the food you buy will be used, but let's be honest, that level of detail is not for everyone. We've listed below some good meal planning habits and you can decide what's right for you:

## Meal planning

When planning your meals, allow for flexibility. Consider batch cooking and freezing dishes to have something ready for busy days. Think about buying ingredients that can be used in different dishes - today's roast veg leftovers are tomorrow's Frittata!

## Shopping list

Before you go shopping, check what food you already have. Maybe take a photo of what's in the fridge and cupboards so you can remind yourself when you're in the shop. Making some kind of plan before you head to the shop can really help you only buy what you need (and save money).

## Websites and food apps

There are lots of great online resources that can help you calculate portions, plan shopping and meals. Check out [lovefoodhatewaste.com](http://lovefoodhatewaste.com) for practical food planning resources.

## Share

Even the best plans fail sometimes, so if you have food that you know you're not going to get around to using, offer it to friends, neighbours or to others through a food sharing app, to avoid it going to waste.



# Pumpkin curry

This dish is delicious served with naan bread or rice, a sprinkle of coriander and a wedge of lime.



**Preparation time:**  
45 minutes



**Serves:** 4

## Ingredients:

- 750g pumpkin, seeds removed and cut into chunk
- ½ tablespoon light olive oil
- 125ml vegetable stock
- 2 tablespoons Thai red curry paste
- 200ml coconut milk
- 1 white onion, finely chopped
- 200g can chickpeas
- 2 stalks lemongrass, outer husk removed and chopped very finely
- 14g fresh coriander, chopped
- ½ teaspoon cardamom seeds
- ½ tablespoon mustard seeds
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 limes



## Preparation:

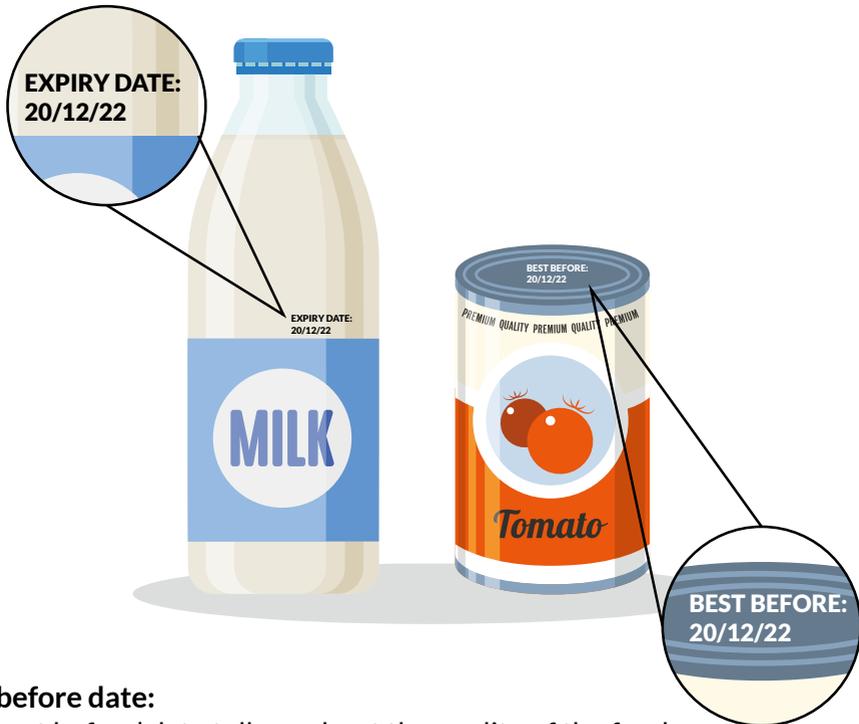
1. Heat the oil in a sauté pan, add the curry paste, onions, lemongrass, cardamom and mustard seeds and gently fry for two or three minutes until fragrant.
2. Add the pumpkin into the pan and stir to coat in the paste.
3. Pour in the stock and coconut milk and bring to a simmer.
4. Add the chickpeas and cook for 10 – 15 minutes until the pumpkin is tender. Season to taste.
5. Squeeze the juice of one lime into the curry and cut the remaining lime into wedges.

# Dates on food packaging

Confusion about what the dates on food mean is one of the top reasons for food being thrown away by people in the UK. So, what do they mean?

## Use by date:

The 'use by' date tells us about the safety of the food. You'll find it on foods that can go off relatively quickly, like vegetables, meat, milk, yogurt. It's important not to eat food after the 'use by' date as it could make you ill.



## Best before date:

The 'best before' date tells us about the quality of the food. You'll find it on frozen, dried, canned and other foods. If the food looks and smells ok, then it's usually ok to eat it after the 'best before' date. Just remember that if you want to eat raw/runny egg, it should be within its 'best before date'.

# Panzanella salad

There are many variations to this traditional recipe such as adding anchovies, leftover roast vegetables or feta cheese.



**Preparation time:**  
30 minutes



**Serves:** 2

## Ingredients:

- 2 slices stale bread
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 small ripe tomatoes or 6 cherry tomatoes, chopped
- ½ a cucumber, chopped
- Capers (optional)
- ½ red onion, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon Red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons chopped basil
- Salt and pepper to taste



## Preparation:

1. Cut or break the bread into bite-sized chunks.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a frying pan with the garlic and then add the bread and sauté, stirring often, until the bread soaks up the olive oil and starts browning around the edges. Season with salt and remove the garlic.
3. Place the tomatoes, cucumber, and onion in a salad bowl with the capers.
4. Mix a dressing with three parts olive oil to one-part red wine vinegar, plus salt and pepper.
5. Add the bread and dressing to the salad with the torn basil leaves.
6. Leave to sit for up to an hour to allow the bread to soften and the flavours to blend.



# Getting food portions right

Knowing the right amount to cook is sometimes a bit of a 'guesstimation', and for a lot of people, that works. But if we cook too much food without a plan for how we'll use the leftovers, they often end up in the bin.

To the right is a guide to typical portion sizes, but, we all have different appetites so the important thing is to get to know what the right amount is for you and that'll help you cook just what you need. Why not try finding your own way to measure the right portion? For instance, after measuring dry foods on the scales, find a cup or bowl that could be used instead. There are also lots of food portion calculators online that will help you measure out different types of food depending on how many people you're cooking for.

## Rice:

One mug of dry rice will feed four adults once cooked (75ml – 100ml per person).

## Pasta:

An average portion is 75 – 100g per person. As a guide, a portion of uncooked spaghetti would fit on top of a 20p coin.

## Vegetables, beans, and lentils:

3 tablespoons (80g) per person

## Meat, poultry, and fish:

One piece about the size of your hand (100g) per person.

Remember too, you can often buy foods in smaller portions such as half cucumbers, or small loaves of bread. They can help make sure you get just what you need and avoid extra going to waste.

# Stir fried rice

If you've got some frozen cooked vegetables, they can be added straight from the freezer to the frying pan for this dish.



**Preparation time:**  
10 minutes



**Serves:** 2

## Ingredients:

- Vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 fresh chilli, chopped or chilli flakes
- 2 cups cooked rice
- Any cooked vegetables such as red pepper, green beans, cabbage, mushrooms, spring onions
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce or tamari



## Preparation:

1. Heat the oil in a frying pan or wok, add the onion and cook until softened.
2. Add the garlic and chilli and cook for a few minutes.
3. Add the rice and stir until coated and warmed through.
4. Add the cooked vegetables
5. When the vegetables are warmed through, add a couple of tablespoons of soy sauce, stir and serve.

# Storing food

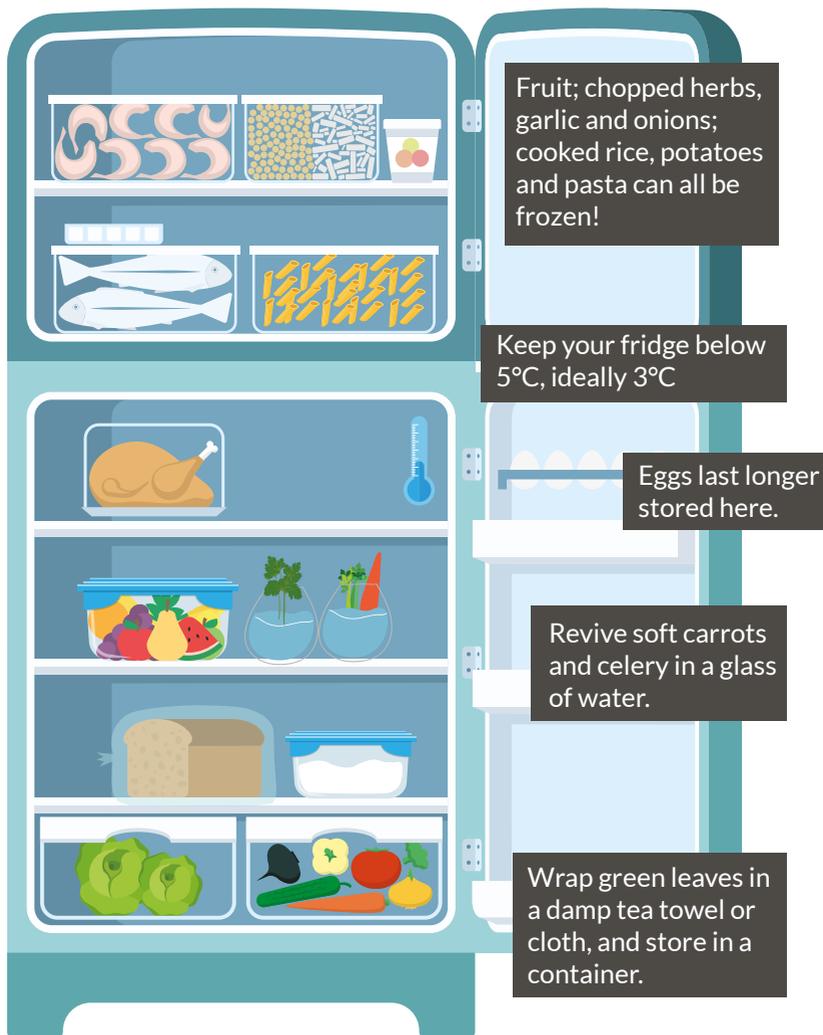
The way we store our food can make a big difference to how long it stays fresh. Most food packaging includes storage advice so it's a good idea to follow that guidance. Below we've included some reminders of what stores best in the fridge and freezer.

Foods with 'use by' date, like bread and cheese can be frozen - freeze up to the end of that date. If frozen on the 'use by' date, use immediately on day they're defrosted

Keep cooked and raw meats separate and well wrapped.

Storing fruit in the fridge makes it last longer. Bananas do go black in the fridge but can still be eaten.

Store lettuce in the drawer, it's the right moisture level and temperature.



# Anything goes soup

This is the perfect recipe for when you've got lots of bits of veg to use up, even if they're past their best they'll be perfectly good for this soup. You could also add cooked meat or a tin of chickpeas to make it extra filling.



**Preparation time:**  
45 minutes



**Serves:** 4

## Ingredients:

- Any veg you have in the fridge
- 1 x tin chopped tomatoes
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 teaspoons dried herbs such as basil, thyme, oregano or marjoram
- Litre vegetable stock
- Salt and pepper to taste



## Preparation:

1. Chop vegetables into small chunks and fry in a little oil.
2. Add onions, carrots and other vegetables that take longer to cook to the saucepan first, then add the rest.
3. When all vegetables are fairly soft, add the tin of tomatoes, stock and flavourings.
4. Bring to the boil and simmer for half an hour.



# Food waste recycling and home composting

Even with the best food habits you'll still have things to throw away such as vegetable peelings, eggshells and teabags. Recycled food scraps can be turned into compost or, in some cases, they are used to generate energy. So, if you have a food waste collection service where you live, or enough outdoor space to compost at home, it's a great way to reduce your impact on the environment.

Food waste collection services are available to lots of properties in north London. It's collected using either a food waste recycling bin or, in some areas, it goes in a bigger bin, along with garden waste. Contact your local council to find out what services are on offer where you live, and to find out what can and can't go in your food waste bin.

If you have a garden, an even better way of reducing the environmental impact of your food waste is to compost it at home. Home composting is a great way to deal with your food and garden waste and create nutrient-rich fertiliser for use in your garden. It takes about a year for compost to rot down, after which you can apply it to your flowerbeds, plant pots or vegetable patch.

If neither of these options are available to you, please dispose of your food scraps in the general waste bin.



## Find out more

Our website [nlwa.gov.uk](https://nlwa.gov.uk) is packed with information and tips to help you reduce your waste, or find the best way to reuse/recycle/dispose of common household items. Here you will also find details of projects and events for north London residents such as free cookery workshops, or clothes swapping events.

Visit our [Events](#) page to find out what's happening near you.

You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

Keep in touch and share your own tips and experiences!



## Keep those good food habits going!

If you're done with this booklet, please pass it on to someone else. Hopefully you'll have some great tips of your own to pass along with it.



Pass me on  
when you've  
read me