4 Steps to a Less Wasteful Thanksgiving

By Madeleine Deliee | November 10, 2016



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When we picture Thanksgiving, many of us think of a table groaning with food. We revel in this abundance and it has largely become the visual of the holiday: Bring on the meal! Let the wood buckle under our bounty!

The dark downside to all of this, however, is what comes after. What about all of the many foil-wrapped bundles of leftovers that sit… and sit… and sit until eventually they are thrown away?

VIDEO OF THE DAY

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Food waste is both a tremendous burden on the environment and a huge source of money literally thrown in the trash. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the United States wastes about a third of its food supply annually and the National Resources Defense Council announced last August that most households throw away about a quarter of what they purchase, averaging a loss of $1,365 to $2,275 for a family of four. In order to keep your cash in your pocket instead of in the garbage, follow these guidelines to host a Thanksgiving for which both the earth and your wallet will be thankful.

Make what people actually eat

Don't cook out of sentimentality. No one actually likes sweet potatoes with marshmallows? Ditch them. Everyone in your family has embraced the paleo movement? Strike the stuffing. Think about the dishes that always end up passed around the table with little evidence of interest. If you "always have it" but no one is enjoying it, find a related recipe to try instead. Or investigate a new option that could replace the tired one that's overstayed its welcome.

Be realistic about quantity

No one wants to run out of food, but the holidays often cause us to lose perspective on what people are likely to actually eat. According to The Food Network, you should plan on a pound and a quarter of turkey and a pound of sides per person. Furthermore, unless your guests are the kind who will happily relieve you of leftovers, don't cook extras because you're afraid of running out. Keep a few staples on hand that can easily be thrown on the table in the event of a true food shortage (such as carrots, which are inexpensive, cook quickly, and can be used for purposes other than the holiday meal)—but realistically, you're probably going to have more than will be eaten. Which leads us to…

Know your family's habits

If leftovers always go moldy in your house and no one wants to take food home with them, adhere to a strict menu (both number of items and quantity made). Even if your family will happily consume the holiday remainders, have a clear plan for using them. Everyone gets tired of turkey by the third go-around and having an amazing recipe for a dish that disguises it a little can make the use-it-up phase go much easier. Tetrazzini and other casseroles are popular options. My mom makes crepes stuffed with turkey, broccoli, and cashews. It sounds weird, but they're delicious and they get the leftovers eaten in a hurry.

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Plan for help

If you are involved in a bigger-than-usual celebration (like an extra-large family gathering or a meal hosted by an organization) with unavoidable quantity attached, see if food can be donated elsewhere; food banks, food pantries, and food rescue programs (such as soup kitchens or shelters) may be willing to take your unused food. Find out well before the big day however; most groups will be unable to assist you in coordinating logistics on the day-of.Mindful planning of your meal won't prevent you from enjoying the occasion or having a festive Thanksgiving. It will just prevent you from tossing your money away, along with those leftover sweet potatoes. Plan for help If you are involved in a bigger-than-usual celebration (like an extra-large family gathering or a meal hosted by an organization) with unavoidable quantity attached, see if food can be donated elsewhere; food banks, food pantries, and food rescue programs (such as soup kitchens or shelters) may be willing to take your unused food. Find out well before the big day however; most groups will be unable to assist you in coordinating logistics on the day-of.

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