

## 5 TIPS FOR BETTER REFRIGERATOR ORGANIZATION and Less Waste!

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### What's in YOUR refrigerator?



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With the positive energy of the new year still upon us, it's a great time to dig into kitchen organization projects. Let's start with the refrigerator - one place that easily gets sidelined, yet can be a haven for disorganization and food waste!

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) - "30-40 percent of all food produced in the United States ends up in a landfill. Half of all food waste is from households and amounts to 150,000 tons each day."

Awareness of food waste and working to lower it has been a growing food trend for the past several years for both home and commercial kitchens. With a strong desire to do better, many look for strategies that have an impact. In any type of kitchen, having an organized refrigerator is a big win. It not only assists in menu planning and purchasing, but it also lessens waste while increasing food safety. An added bonus? It positively affects your budget bottom line!

Here are 5 refrigerator organization tips adapted from commercial kitchen processes for use in home kitchens -

#### 1. Use the cooler and warmer zones to your best advantage

Refrigerators found in home kitchens come in many sizes and interior configurations which can present challenges for maximizing cold and warm zones so getting to know your appliance is critical. Generally, the coldest zone in a refrigerator is near the back and at the bottom, the medium cold zones are the middle and top shelves, with the warmest zone is in the door.

Given that, it's best to store:

- condiments and other items containing natural preservatives such as salt and vinegar, bottled water, wine and other non-dairy beverages in the door
- no-cook or pre-cooked items like snacks or left overs on the top shelf
- cheeses and deli meats in the designated drawer, or on top shelf if no drawer available
- dairy items on the middle shelves
- eggs in the door, or on top or middle shelves
- fruits and vegetables separately in the designated storage bins - one for fruit, one for vegetables  
*Check the humidity settings on fruit and vegetable bins. Fruit does best with low humidity, vegetables do best with high humidity.*
- meat, fish and seafood in separate bins, or on plates or rimmed trays on the lowest shelf to avoid any drips and cross contamination with other foods

#### 2. Aim for a refrigerator capacity that is 2/3 full

Maintaining a capacity of approximately 2/3 full is ideal for allowing proper air flow and cooling efficiency, which lessens chances of food spoilage.

### 3. Label containers with contents name and date

- use a Sharpie marker and painter's tape or removable labels  
-- or --
- write directly on containers with an erasable marker

#### Professional Tip:

Consider taking labeling a step further by creating an inventory list for refrigerated and/or frozen foods. Many restaurants and food service operations use this strategy for refrigerated, frozen and pantry items to assist with menu planning and ordering. Begin by listing each food item on paper or a white board, place the list outside the refrigerator or freezer, then change the quantity or cross out items as they are used.

### 4. Adopt a "First In, First Out" approach

Restaurants and food service groups live by this rule to limit spoilage and waste - what goes into the refrigerator first is used first. Place older items near the front where they are more easily visible and newer items to the back. Keep rotating the containers forward as items are used or added. If you come across anything that has spoiled, discard it immediately.

### 5. Consider basic food safety rules for refrigeration

- Ensure that your refrigerator is set at 40°F or below and freezer is at 0°F or below.
- Use the "Two-Hour Rule" for food items requiring refrigeration. Discard any perishable food items, including left-overs, left at room temperature for more than 2 hours unless they've been properly kept cold or hot. In cases where air temperature is 90°F or above, the time frame shortens to 1 hour. Think about this when transporting groceries, cooked foods, foods on buffets or set out for picnics, and such.
- Have a keen eye for food spoilage - items that smell or look suspicious should be discarded. Be aware that in some cases, food may not taste, smell or look bad, but pathogenic bacteria can grow (rather than spoilage bacteria) if food has not been properly refrigerated. Cooking will not kill all of these bacteria.

### HELPFUL ORGANIZATIONAL ITEMS

Restaurants and food service operations regularly use storage bins and other items for separating and organizing fruit, vegetables, meat, seafood, condiments, dairy and other items in cold storage. It helps contain any spills, keeps like items together making it easier to find ingredients, and helps lessen spoilage. Try using some of these organizers in your refrigerator:

- bins of various sizes and shapes
- trays or rimmed baking sheets
- baskets
- turntable or Lazy Susan
- can dispenser
- colander