

Reducing Food Waste & Recycling Food Scraps

Every year Australians throw away an estimated three million tonnes or \$5.2 billion of food. Most of us have thrown away uneaten leftovers, spoiled fruit and vegetables or food products that have passed their best-before date. Wasted food is not only a waste of money, it's a waste of the resources used to grow, harvest, transport, process, store and distribute food.

Reducing food waste

Research by the [NSW government](#) has shown that most households buy too much food, cook too much food, and throw away leftovers. With the right information, minimising your food waste can be easy.

- Know how much food to cook for each person
- Store your food appropriately to keep it fresher for longer
- Think of tasty ways to use your leftovers
- Work out a weekly meal plan for your household
- Make a shopping list and stick to it
- Work out a divide-and-share system with a friend or neighbour if you're buying perishable items in bulk

For more information on how to reduce your food waste, visit the [Love Food Hate Waste](#) website. You'll find a handy hints on buying and storing food, a portion calculator, great recipe ideas and surprising food facts.

If you have non-perishable food items that you no longer need such as tins, rice or pasta, you may be able to donate them to a local charity. Ring first to check whether they take food donations, and if so, which items are acceptable.

Why recycle food scraps?

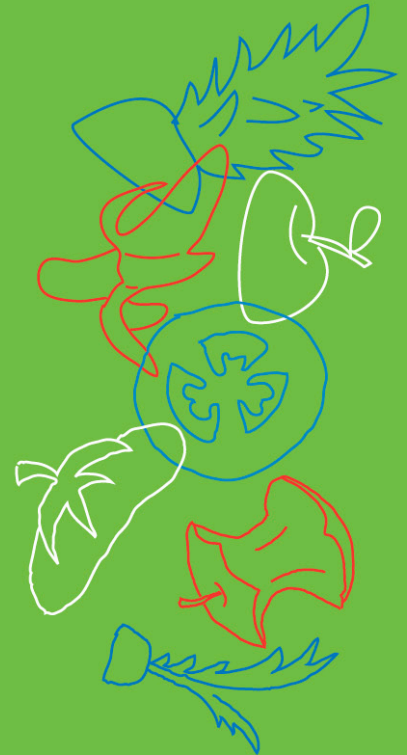
No matter how careful we are, we'll always have some unavoidable food scraps such as vegetable peelings. Even here, we can reduce our impact by recycling food scraps for compost.

When food scraps are sent to landfill, they decompose without oxygen (anaerobically) to produce methane, a greenhouse gas with over 20 times the global warming capacity of carbon dioxide. Decomposing food scraps are also a potential source of leachates (liquid that drains from landfills) that can contaminate surface and ground water.



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If food scraps are composted, the organic matter and nutrients they contain can be reused as fertiliser. Properly composted food scraps are a valuable resource. In some commercial composters, methane and other biogases can also be captured and used to generate electricity.

Recycling Options

For households: Having your own compost bin, compost heap, worm farm or Bokashi bucket is a cheap, rewarding way to recycle your food scraps and garden cuttings. Worm farms can be kept in courtyards, balconies or even inside if space is limited. Many councils and community gardens run composting and worm farming workshops to help you get started.

While many councils in Australia provide a kerbside collection service for garden cuttings, very few currently offer food scrap collections. This may change over time, so keep an eye out for news from your council or check the services available in your local area at RecyclingNearYou.com.au.

For businesses: In many areas, commercial operators can provide businesses with a collection and recycling service for food scraps. To find an operator near you, visit BusinessRecycling.com.au.

What Happens When Food Scraps Are Composted?

Composting is the biological breakdown of organic matter (such as food scraps or garden cuttings) into humus or compost; a material containing stable yet readily-available nutrients. Microorganisms (such as bacteria and fungi) and microfauna (such as insects and worms) break down the organic material in the presence of oxygen.

By controlling composting conditions such as the carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, temperature, moisture and aeration, we can influence the composting process. Compost is an excellent soil conditioner that improves soil fertility and encourages plant growth. Good composting practices also reduce the amount of methane produced.

A worm farm is a particular type of composting system where worms play the largest role in the decomposition process.

Commercial composters may use a variety of specialised anaerobic composting systems to speed up the rate of decomposition and to capture any methane produced in the process. The methane can then be captured and used to generate electricity.

More Info

Compost for Soils (www.compostforsoils.com.au)
South Australian Food Centre's [food waste resources](#)
OzHarvest (www.ozharvest.org.au)
FoodBank (www.foodbank.com.au)



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