



# CONSUMER SENSE

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## Spend Smart Strategy - Reduce Waste and Use What You Have

by Charlotte Richert, OSU Extension Family & Consumer Sciences Educator

At home, the average American family throws away 14 percent of their food according to a 2004 USDA funded study. In 2009, that could be over \$1,000 a year in meats, fruit, vegetables and grain products. We lose money whenever we toss food because it spoiled before we got around to eating it. Are you throwing your money in the trash! How do we reduce food waste at home? Planning helps us spend less at the grocery store, and helps us to avoid throwing away food.

“Planned-over's” can be a great way to use all the food you prepare and provide quick and easy meals. Planned-over means preparing food purposely for casseroles, soups, or snacks and in lunch boxes after they have been served once. For example, roast beef served with gravy/potatoes and carrots could become roast beef stew or BBQ sandwiches at another meal.

If there is food waste in your household, ask yourself why...

- Are you buying food in the right quantities?
  - Is food refused or left on the plate?
    - Are servings too large?
    - Is the food cooked properly?

If you have a problem with food spoilage, learn how to keep track of leftovers using a leftovers list to save you time and money. Wasting leftovers increases food costs. Create a "leftovers" or "to use up list" and post it on the fridge. This tip should significantly reduce the amount of food spoilage in your house. It could also save money by allowing you to eat more home-cooked food and less pre-packaged meals. .

Refrigerator Use Up List
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Romaine lettuce - 1 head
<input type="checkbox"/> Watermelon
<input type="checkbox"/> Tortillas, flour - 8
<input type="checkbox"/> Macaroni salad - 1.5 cups
<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey deli meat - 2 oz
<input type="checkbox"/>

Freezer Use Up List
<input type="checkbox"/> Corn - 2 cups
<input type="checkbox"/> Bananas - 3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chicken broth - 4 cups
<input type="checkbox"/> Broccoli, chopped - 10 oz
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

If you find you are not good at using leftovers, then freeze remaining portions to be eaten at a later date for lunches or snacks. Make sure you date the item and put it in a container appropriate for freezing. For a complete list of recommendations on food safety in the refrigerator, click onto [www.oces.tulsacounty.org](http://www.oces.tulsacounty.org); family & consumer sciences; food, nutrition, and wellness; food safety.

Another way to reduce food waste is to reduce the size of recipes. When reducing recipes, you may need to use smaller saucepans, skilletes, and baking pans. Two web sites that let you adjust recipes to smaller serving sizes are [www.mealsforyou.com](http://www.mealsforyou.com) and [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com).

From time to time, some food may still become unsafe to eat. If it is not an animal product, then you may use it in a compost pile. For more information about managing your home and family, contact the OSU Extension Service or visit the web site for helpful tips.

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## *Improving Garden Soils*

By Bruce Peverley, OSU Extension Agriculture Educator

**F**resh vegetables are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals essential to good health. Home raised vegetables can reduce your family food expenditures plus provide a satisfying experience of self-accomplishment.

To achieve a good yield of garden vegetables, make sure your garden soil is in good shape. The following practices will benefit your soil and garden production.

### **Add organic matter to your garden each year.**

Excellent sources of organic matter are animal manure, composted material such as leaves, grass clippings, hay or straw. Adding organic matter makes heavy clay soils lighter and will increase water holding capacity of sandy soils. Soil erosion is reduced with the addition of organic material. Organic matter addition also provides some nitrogen and other needed nutrients to plants and encourages micro-organism growth and function.

How much organic matter do you add? What is acceptable varies with different soil types. A good rule of thumb is to add one inch of manure or compost to your garden site annually. Always till the material into your soil. Do not use wood chips as an organic matter source as they decompose, and they tie up the nitrogen in the soil. This can cause a nitrogen deficiency.

**A soil test on your garden site is recommended** at least

once every three years. A routine soil test will provide you with the knowledge of your soil pH, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium levels. Soil samples brought to the Tulsa County Extension Center will be analyzed by the Oklahoma State University soil testing laboratory. Recommendations tell you the amount of commercial fertilizer to use on your garden. The cost of a routine soil test is \$10 per sample. At the Extension Center we process over one thousand vegetable garden soil samples per year. The only means of determining what level of fertility your garden actually requires is by testing. Many gardens are found to require no additional fertilizer or are found to have excessive nutrient content. Fertilizing these soils when fertilizer is not needed just costs you money. **Don't guess, soil test.**

Here's what is needed to get the soil tested:

1. Use a soil probe or shovel and take samples five to ten inches deep from the garden area.
2. Take ten random samples across the garden and mix them together in a clean plastic bucket. This will achieve getting a representative sample of soil from the entire garden space.
3. From your composite of samples, bring to the extension center one dry, clean **pint** of this mixture.

For more information on soil testing and management or on other gardening aspects, contact the Tulsa County OSU Extension Center at 918/746-3700.

## *Berries Are Best Garden Value*

By Sue Gray, OSU Extension Horticulture Educator

**S**trawberries are tasty, nutritious and easy to grow. A good yield from established berry gardens is about a quart of fresh fruit for every five feet of planting bed. February 1 to March 20 is the planting time for strawberries in Oklahoma.

Strawberries can be purchased from local nurseries as bundles of dormant plants. There are usually 25 small plants to a bundle. Five bundles, 125 plants, provide enough fruit for fresh eating, freezing and preserves for a family of four. Plants are also sold in individual pots, but these are more expensive.

Select at least three different varieties. This will spread out both flowering and ripening season, avoiding the risk of freezing weather.

Strawberries grow best on a well-drained sunny site. Preferred soil pH is 6.0 to 6.5. They can also be grown in raised beds and containers.

Place plants in a wide, raised bed or in a straight row, spacing them 1.5 feet apart.

All leaves and buds on strawberries emerge from a central crown. Depth of planting should be such that the crown is not buried, yet the roots are not exposed to open air.

Water plants in with a water-soluble starter solution fertilizer. Plan to fertilize again after harvest.

Our long Oklahoma summers enable us to allow strawberries to bear their first year. Further north, it is suggested that all blooms be picked off the first year of planting to enable plants to get established.

Flowering occurs in late April, followed about 30 days later by delicious fruit. If frost or freezes threaten during bloom, cover plants with straw mulch, cotton sheets or polyester frost blankets.

Freeze damaged flowers will be black in the center, indicating a lost potential for berry harvest.

Harvest berries when fruit is red from the cap down to the tip. Ripe berries will easily pull from the plant with a snap. Leave the green caps on the fruit until ready for use and store for up to three days in the refrigerator.

When harvest is over, fertilize plants and provide plenty of water during the summer.

Plants will send out runners, providing daughter plants to fill in the bed.

Late summer is the time when flower buds are formed in the crown of plants for the next year's crop.

For more information on growing strawberries and other fruit, check our Tulsa County Master Gardener Website:

**[www.tulsamastergardeners.org](http://www.tulsamastergardeners.org)**

You will find resources for fruit growing that include OSU Extension Fact Sheet No. F-6214, "**Growing Strawberries in the Home Garden**": <http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1031/HLA-6214web.pdf>