

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

EcoConsumer

How to reduce food waste during this season of indulgence

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

Food fuels the holidays. Family dinners, parties, food as gifts — many of our most vivid holiday memories involve food.

That abundance of meals and treats also contributes greatly to the spike in waste that occurs every year between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Food waste makes up more than 25 percent of King County's garbage.

Reducing holiday food waste helps both the environment and your wallet. During the holidays alone, the average household of four could save \$100 to \$150 by reducing food waste, says Tim Jones, a University of Arizona anthropologist who has studied food waste for 15 years. Jones and other experts offer these tips:

Know what gets eaten

For the big holiday meals, Jones advises reducing the amount of most side vegetables you serve — sweet potatoes, broccoli and green beans, for example — by half or one-third. Most people eat small portions of those veggies, if any, preferring to feast instead on the main attractions such as turkey, dressing, potatoes and gravy.

Take care of leftovers

Refrigerate or freeze your leftovers promptly. If you leave food out at room temperature for more than two hours, it becomes a health risk, advises Seattle-King County Public Health. Warm food can go directly into the refrigerator, but should first be placed in shallow containers, for quicker cooling.

Resources

If possible, distribute leftovers to guests to take home, based on

King County's food-waste tips: www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/foodwaste

Seattle Public Utilities' composting tips: www.seattle.gov/util/Services/Yard/Composting/SPU01_001997.asp

Food Lifeline's list of wanted foods: www.foodlifeline.org/help/individuals/foods.html

Virginia Cooperative Extension's food storage tips and chart: www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/foods/348-960/348-960.html

what they like. Leftovers will more likely get eaten that way.

Freezing increases the probability that leftovers will not go to waste, since they keep so much longer. For instance, you can freeze a slice of baked fruit pie for up to eight months, according to the Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Be discrete with treats

Before giving cookies or candy as gifts or treats, make sure the recipients want them.

Many folks end up throwing away holiday cookies they receive, often because of concerns about weight gain.

To battle that holiday bulge and reduce waste at the same time, consider buying less candy. Jones' research shows that 20 percent of all candy gets tossed out uneaten.

Donate selectively

Consider donating food you don't use. Local food banks appreciate many canned items, including juices, nuts, fruits and vegetables.

Food banks do not want perishables, homemade foods, open items, rusty cans or unlabeled cans.

Give food scraps new life

Some food scraps, such as vegetable trimmings or what gets left on people's plates, obviously can't be served. Fortunately, the Seattle area boasts some of the best options in the nation for food-waste composting.

Resources and supplies abound for composting food at home. As an easier option, residents of Seattle and more than 15 other area communities can put food waste and food-soiled paper in their yard-waste collection containers.

Check with your local hauler to find out exactly what you can include in the yard-waste bin. Seattle does not accept meat, fish or dairy products, but in many other King County communities you can toss in all food waste.

Local food waste mixed with yard waste goes to Cedar Grove Composting's large processing facilities

in Maple Valley and Everett, where it gets turned into compost that is sold by retailers throughout the Northwest.

Food waste triples during the holidays, says Jones. But by carefully planning your holiday food, judiciously using the leftovers and composting the rest, you'll save money and give a welcome gift to the environment.

Follow-up to my Nov. 4 column about diapers: Thank you to reader Kathy Schmid, who pointed out that I should have mentioned Sunflower Diaper Service (206-782-4199). Note that this neighborhood cloth diaper service operates only in North Seattle, from the ship canal to 130th Street.

The monthly EcoConsumer column aims to help readers balance consuming and conserving. Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services. Reach him at tom.watson@metrokc.gov. Watch for more EcoConsumer resources from King County at www.KCecoconsumer.com.

[Copyright © 2006 The Seattle Times Company](#)