

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference

Have a Berry Healthy Summer

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Summer is almost here! As we warm up at the Jersey shore, we may find ourselves craving lighter and more refreshing foods. This is also the time of year when strawberries are in season. While taste alone is a great enough reason to enjoy them, adding strawberries to your routine can also add to your overall health.

Seasonal Eating

Seasonal eating means choosing foods that are growing locally during their natural harvest time. Because they are grown in season and closer to home, local strawberries are more likely to be picked near peak ripeness, take less time after harvest to get to your plate, and be the most flavorful.



Benefits of Strawberries

- ◆ Strawberry season inspires us to add another serving of fruit to our day. Research shows that people who eat more fruits and vegetables tend to have better long-term health, including a lower risk of dying from heart disease, cancer, and respiratory disease.
- ◆ One cup of strawberries gives us more than a full day's worth of vitamin C. Vitamin C helps the body make collagen, supports skin healing, and helps the immune system work properly.
- ◆ Strawberries contain ellagic acid, a phytonutrient that acts as an antioxidant. Researchers are studying it for possible anti-inflammatory and cell-protective effects in the human body.

There are many easy ways to enjoy fresh strawberries. They are a quick addition to a yogurt or cottage cheese snack. Try sliced strawberries and low-fat ricotta cheese on whole-grain crackers for a unique snack option. Add fruit to breakfast by serving strawberries with whole-grain pancakes, peanut butter toast, or overnight oats. Strawberries and spinach are a classic spring pairing for a light, colorful salad that can be served at lunch or dinner.

Strawberries are the first taste of a longer summer berry season. One benefit of eating seasonally is that it naturally brings more variety to our meals as different fruits and vegetables come into season. We can enjoy locally grown berries throughout the summer, starting

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Eat Healthy and Prevent Food Waste

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Planning by developing a weekly grocery list helps to limit impulse buying. Make sure you keep a list of the foods and staple items you run out of so that it is easy to write your grocery list. Buying less but more often allows you to make sure your food is fresh. Make sure you take into consideration nights you will eat out or will not be cooking.



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Here are some additional tips to keep your kitchen safe and organized:

- ◆ **Donate any excess food items to a food bank or soup kitchen BEFORE the food goes bad.** Having a refrigerator or storage area filled with foods purchased years ago takes up space for more recent items. Old food often has changed color, texture, and quality even if it is not a food hazard.
- ◆ **Store foods properly on a shelf, refrigerator, or freezer.** Make sure to separate fruit and vegetables in your refrigerator. Potatoes and onions need to be stored in a cool, dry place, not the refrigerator. Bananas ripen on the counter, and most ripened fruit needs to be refrigerated. Other fruits like berries might be frozen. Green leafy vegetables need to be refrigerated, and salad greens should be washed right before they are prepared and then refrigerate until serving time.
- ◆ **Eat the whole vegetable.** Try using the green tops of carrots in soup or salads. Orange and grapefruit peels can be candied and used for flavoring desserts. Potato skins can be baked for appetizers. Turkey, chicken and meat bones can be used to make soup bases and stale bread can be used to make croutons for salads or breadcrumbs for coating meat, fish or poultry.
- ◆ **Keep inventory lists of pantry, refrigerator, and freezers.** Put new items that are labeled and dated toward the back of the shelf and move everything else up. Use up the oldest food first and don't replace food items until you have used what is on hand. Replenish perishable foods as you use them.
- ◆ **Read food labels and notice expiration dates.** "Sell by", "Use by", "Enjoy by" and "Best Used Before" dates generally indicate food quality, not safety of the product. These labels are not well regulated and do not guarantee food safety. Advocates and environmentalists have been warning for years that many people interpret date labels as a sign that food is no longer good to eat. One industry survey found 91% of consumers have mistakenly thrown away past-date food, even though the label only signals the manufacturer's "guesstimate" at its peak quality.
- ◆ **Waste diaries keep your kitchen organized.** Use your phone to track wasted food for two weeks or more. Create a "waste food hard copy" if that works better for you. Plan your shopping lists using this list as a guide and adjust your purchases accordingly.
- ◆ **Cook reasonable sized food portions for your family.** Keep a careful eye on how much you cook and how much the family eats. Plate waste is a huge issue at home and when eating out. Split large portions at a restaurant and take half home for another meal.

Take small steps to organize your kitchen and food purchases to prevent food waste. Keep the environment healthy and eat fresh food that tastes good and maintains good quality



Taking Action Against Hunger:

Simple Ways to Support NJ Communities



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Across New Jersey, families continue to face rising food costs, limited access

to nutritious options, and persistent gaps in food security. Emergency food providers, including food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens, serve as critical lifelines in meeting these needs. Are you interested in how to engage with this system or how to make the most meaningful impact? Rutgers Cooperative Extension recently hosted a webinar offering practical steps for anyone looking to get involved.

What the Webinar Covered

The session walked participants through the emergency food provider system, ways to volunteer or donate effectively, and how advocacy can strengthen long term food security. Whether you're new to this work or already involved, the webinar shared easy, actionable ways to make a difference right where you live. Below are a few key highlights, and you can find the full recording on the Rutgers Cooperative Extension website under Archived Wellness Webinars. <https://extension.rutgers.edu/wellness-wednesdays/archive/wellness>.

Understanding Hunger and New Jersey's Emergency Food System

Hunger affects many of our neighbors, including children, seniors, and working adults. Emergency food providers help bridge the gap by providing immediate access to groceries and prepared meals. Understanding how the system operates, from regional food banks that source and distribute food to local pantries and soup kitchens that connect directly with community members, helps volunteers and donors see where their support fits in and how their actions can strengthen the entire system.



How You Can Take Action

Here are a few simple ways you can support local emergency food providers.

Volunteer: Emergency food providers rely heavily on volunteers

- Options include ongoing, part time, or one time support
- Individuals, families, and groups are all welcome
- Roles vary based on your skills and availability
- Always check the site's requirements before volunteering

Donate: Always check with your pantry first

- Food: nonperishable, unopened, and not expired
- Money: pantries have stronger purchasing power than individuals and it can cover operating costs
- Hygiene & cleaning supplies: items not covered by nutrition assistance programs
- Clothing: some pantries offer clothing closets

Advocacy and Creating Lasting Change

Community members can also support hunger relief efforts by spreading awareness and advocating for systems level solutions. Sharing accurate information on social media, partnering with workplaces or schools to organize drives, and contacting local officials about food access policies all help amplify impact.

Every person has a role to play in supporting neighbors and strengthening our food system. Whether you volunteer, donate, or promote local efforts, your actions matter and they add up. To learn more, watch the webinar: **[Volunteer, Donate, Promote: Your Guide to Fighting Hunger in NJ](#)**. You'll walk away with practical tools, local resources, and inspiration to make an immediate difference in your community.

Additional Resources for Getting Involved

If you're ready to take the next step, these trusted resources can help you find volunteer opportunities and learn about advocacy:

- **[Rutgers NJ Food Pantry List](#):** A statewide directory of food pantries organized by county.
- **[NJ State Volunteer and National Service Directory](#):** Find statewide volunteer opportunities across a variety of agencies and organizations.
- **[Food Research & Action Center](#):** Explore research, policy updates, and tools to advocate for stronger anti hunger programs nationwide.
- **[Hunger Free NJ](#):** Learn how to support hunger relief policy efforts right here in New Jersey.



Improving Sustainability and Making the Most of Produce

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The Environmental Protection Agency estimated that in 2019, 66.2 million tons of food was wasted in the United States and about 40% of this food waste occurred at the household level! The most effective way to reduce food waste is to prevent it from happening in the first place.



This can be done through strategies like planning grocery trips, shopping intentionally, and practicing mindful consumption.² One way to prevent wasted food is by Root-to-Fruit cooking, which focuses on using all edible parts of fruits and vegetables in the home.

Why does Root-to-Fruit Matter?

- ✓ **Sustainability and Waste Reduction:** Root-to-Fruit practices help reduce food waste by utilizing all edible parts of produce. This makes shopping, cooking, and meal preparation more sustainable. Instead of discarding stems, peels, roots, and leaves, these components become valuable ingredients in everyday meals and snacks.
- ✓ **Savings:** This practice helps save money by using more parts of the produce, increasing the overall amount of food on your plate. Parts of produce that might otherwise be thrown away can instead be used to prepare side dishes, toppings or flavorings.
- ✓ **Nutrition:** Parts of produce that are often tossed aside offer additional nutritional benefits like dietary fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Incorporating peels, stems, and leaves can increase the overall nutrient density of meals.
- ✓ **Time:** When incorporating stems, leaves, and roots, less time may be spent peeling or trimming produce. This can simplify food preparation while adding volume to meals, which may also provide extra portions for leftovers to enjoy.



Tips to Incorporate Roots-to-Fruit Practices

- ◆ Save stalks from broccoli and cauliflower which can be prepared just like florets. Stalks can be grilled or sautéed as a side dish, made into a slaw, riced, or even spiralized into noodles.
- ◆ Freeze extra leaves, stems, and roots to use for vegetable stock later. This strategy reduces waste and creates a nutritious, low-sodium base for soups, stews, and sauces.
- ◆ Stems of kale, Swiss chard, turnips, beets, and collard greens can be sautéed. Note that stems take longer to cook so be sure to add to the pan before leafy portions.
- ◆ Citrus peels, such as oranges or lemon, can be zested and frozen and used later for extra flavor, added to deserts, dressings, and sauces.
- ◆ Roast pumpkin or squash seeds. These can be used as a crunch topping for salads or granola or even enjoyed as a snack on their own.

Not all parts of all plants are safe to eat, however! Be cautious when starting out with Root-to-Fruit cooking and confirm what you are using is safe to eat. Remember to always rinse your produce well, especially when using peels!

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Small Actions, Big Impact:

How Composting Can Help Your Home and Our Planet

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Every day in New Jersey, families throw away food without even thinking about it. Maybe it is wilted lettuce, forgotten, or an apple that sat too long in a lunchbox. It might not seem like a big deal, but when we add it all up, food waste becomes a very real problem for our environment, our wallets, and our communities. That is why Rutgers Cooperative Extension offered a free webinar: "Home Composting to Reduce Food Waste." In this session, we explored how simple choices at home can make a big difference. Whether you live in an apartment, a house, or somewhere in between, you can take easy steps to waste less, save money, and help our planet.

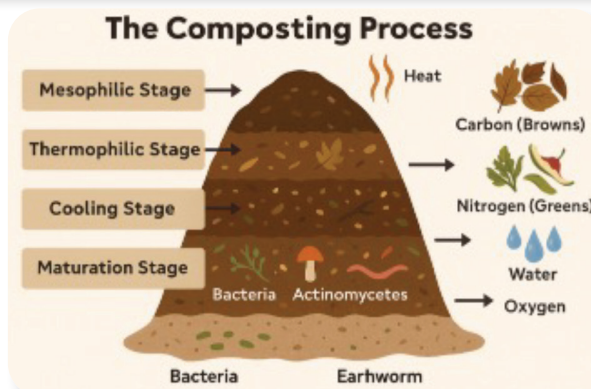
Four Key Highlights from the Webinar

Here is a quick glimpse of what we covered in the webinar, four key themes to help you better understand food waste, learn the basics of composting, and feel confident getting started at home. No matter what your living situation, small steps truly make a big difference.

- 1. Why Food Waste Matters:** About one third of the food in the U.S. is wasted each year. When food breaks down in landfills, it releases methane, a greenhouse gas that harms the environment. Food waste also represents wasted water, energy, and money used to grow and transport food. By reducing waste, we protect the planet and support a more environmentally sustainable food system.
- 2. Small Habits That Save Money:** Simple actions like planning meals, using a shopping list, and storing food properly help food last longer. Storing greens with a paper towel and allowing for airflow helps maintain freshness, or freezing leftovers stretches your grocery budget. Tools like the USDA FoodKeeper App can help you track how long foods stay fresh.
- 3. Composting: Nature's Recycling System:** Composting transforms food scraps, like produce peels, vegetable ends, and coffee grounds, into nutrient-rich, healthy soil. Microorganisms break everything down naturally, reducing landfill waste and enriching gardens and green spaces. Composting options include backyard bins, indoor systems, worm bins (vermicomposting), and Bokashi buckets.
- 4. Getting Started with Composting:** Starting is easier than you might think. Collect your food scraps in a container, then mix "greens" (food scraps) with "browns" (leaves, shredded cardboard, newspaper, woodchips). A good ratio to follow is 3-parts "brown" to 1-part "green." Keep the pile moist, like a wrung out sponge, and provide airflow. This will help ensure a balanced and odor-free composting process. Simple adjustments can fix most odor or moisture issues. With patience, you will create healthy compost for your garden or houseplants.

Explore the Full Webinar Recording

If you are interested in exploring composting techniques more deeply, check out our webinar [Home Composting to Reduce Food Waste](#). You will learn practical tips and see composting methods step by step. For additional Rutgers resources on composting, you can also explore our Community Garden [Keys to Successful Composting](#) webpage and the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet [Home Composting \(FS811\)](#). Together we can work to keep New Jersey cleaner, greener, and more sustainable, one small action at a time.



From Cart to Plate:

Easy Ways to Add More Fruits & Veggies

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Fruit and vegetables are essential for overall health. Eating more of them can reduce the risk of certain cancers and diabetes, support weight management, improve cholesterol and blood sugar levels, and promote healthy gut bacteria. Their benefits come from fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytonutrients that help fight inflammation and support digestion. Experts recommend five to nine 1-cup servings per day or simply filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables at each meal. Try our favorite tips below to get started?

Shopping and Storage Strategies

Shop smarter by starting with a plan. Use these strategies to build a shopping list that helps you add more fruits and vegetables to your cart.

- ✓ Select produce that is locally grown. In New Jersey, that's "Jersey Fresh." Fruits and vegetables that are grown locally do not travel as long and are typically fresher and tastier than foods transported long distances.
- ✓ Buy frozen fruits and vegetables in bags, rather than boxes. You can use as much or as little as you want. Then, tightly seal the bag to preserve flavor and store what is left for another time.
- ✓ Choose canned vegetables labeled "no salt added" and fruit packed in 100% fruit juice. If sugar or salt is added, rinse before eating. For dried options, look for "unsweetened" or "no added salt."

Mealtime Tips

Make mealtime easier with these convenient tips to effortlessly add more fruits and vegetables into your recipes.

- ✓ Puree cooked starchy vegetables like potatoes to make a thickener for soups, stews, and gravies. Add a little blended cottage cheese, too, if desired, for a creamier texture.
- ✓ Boost your breakfast! Veggies are delicious in omelets or scrambled eggs. Try adding onions, peppers, or mushrooms for a burst of flavor and added nutrition.
- ✓ Shred or puree zucchini, carrots, or squash into sauces, meatballs, muffins, and mac and cheese

Give Prepared Foods a Boost

When time is limited, prepared food options can help you stay on track and increase your fruit and vegetable intake. Prepared foods can still support healthy choices.

- ✓ Pair pizza with a salad or steamed vegetables for a wholesome, healthy meal.
- ✓ Like Mexican food? Warm canned pinto beans or fat-free/reduced-fat refried beans in the microwave. Add low-fat or non-fat cheese, vegetables and salsa, and roll mixture in a whole wheat tortilla.
- ✓ Pre-cut fruits and vegetables can be a big time-saver. Cut and chop fresh broccoli, carrots, peppers, and onions. Slice oranges, kiwi, and strawberries. By spending 20-30 minutes pre-cutting fruits and vegetables, you'll have them available when time is short for meal or snack prep.

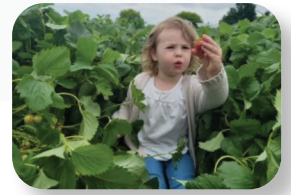
Colorful Foods, Strong Health

Fruits and vegetables come in a vibrant array of colors for a reason—their colors signal the unique nutrients they contain. Eating a "rainbow" ensures you get a wide range of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals to support your health. Let the rainbow be your guide: each color offers its own benefits, so enjoy a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables every day.



For more information and additional tips and tricks on shopping smart, adding fruits and vegetables to meals, boosting up prepared foods, and eating the colors of the rainbow, check out our fact sheet at [FS1079: Quick & Easy Ways to Eat More Fruits and Vegetables](#)





with strawberries and moving on to blueberries, followed by blackberries towards the end of summer. Swap them into the same meals and snacks where you enjoyed strawberries to keep your routine going with new colors, flavors, and nutrients. Updating your berry routine with the seasons will help you diversify the nutrients and beneficial plant compounds in your diet.

Buying/Purchasing local berries is an opportunity to find a new favorite farm stand, farmers market, or pick-your-own farm! Visiting a farm is a fun way for families to spend time together and can help children learn where food comes from. Find a Jersey Fresh farm near you by typing “find Jersey Fresh” into your search bar and using the directory to search for farms, markets, pick-your-own options, and other local food businesses. Before you go, call or check the farm’s website or social media page to make sure berries are available that day. Strawberry season is a sweet way to welcome summer, support local farms, and enjoy fresh fruit.

Storing Berries

To preserve their freshness and quality, place berries in the refrigerator right away. Wash them only before you plan to eat or prepare them. If you cut strawberries ahead of time for grab-and-go snacks, prep only what you plan to eat within 1 to 3 days.

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