



# WASTE LESS, SPEND LESS: TIPS FOR EXTENDING THE SHELF LIFE OF PLANT-BASED FOODS WHILE MAXIMIZING YOUR FOOD BUDGET

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Studies show that a plant-based diet can reduce your risk of heart disease<sup>1</sup>, but that isn't the only reason you might want to use plant-based ingredients. Plant-based diets can also be better for the environment and a more sustainable way of eating.<sup>2</sup>

How you store plant-based foods can have a big impact on how long they last. Using a few tips and tricks, you can organize and store your plant-based foods to help them last longer and reduce food waste while eating a heart-healthy diet.

Plus, choosing plant-based foods is also an excellent way to stretch your food budget. By bulking up meals with plant-based options, you can stretch your meals so that you get more servings per recipe.







## Tips for Making Plant-Based Foods Last Longer in the Fridge

Storing fresh produce properly is an important part of eating sustainably and ensuring the money you've spent doesn't go to waste. Here are some tips for ensuring your produce stays fresh in the fridge.

### MAKE SURE YOUR FRIDGE IS AT THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE

- Your fridge should be set at four degrees Celsius (40 degrees Fahrenheit) to slow the growth of harmful bacteria.<sup>3</sup> To ensure your fridge is at the right temperature, consider investing in a fridge thermometer.
- Avoid overloading your fridge, as the cold air needs to circulate to maintain the correct temperature.<sup>4</sup>

### FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

- Many fresh fruits and vegetables need to be stored in the fridge. While some fresh produce, like citrus fruits and melon, can be stored at room temperature, they should be stored in the fridge if they've been cut, peeled, or cooked.<sup>4</sup>
- Avoid washing fresh produce until just before using, as too much moisture can accelerate spoilage.<sup>5</sup>
- Keep fresh produce in the crisper bins to maintain proper moisture levels.
- Items like berries, mushrooms, and salad greens should be stored with a paper towel in the container to absorb excess moisture. Store these items in a crisper drawer with lower humidity settings.
- Separate fruits and vegetables, as some fruits, such as bananas, pears, and apples, give off ethylene gas, which can reduce the storage life of vegetables and other fruits that are stored with them.<sup>6</sup>
- Check your produce regularly for any signs of ripening or spoilage. If you notice that something is damaged or overripe, remove it to prevent it from affecting the rest of your produce.
- Rotate your produce to ensure you use the oldest items first, which can help reduce food waste and ensure freshness.

### FRESH HERBS

- Instead of storing them in the produce bag, take fresh herbs out, wash them, and store them standing up in a glass of water. Replace the water every few days, and your fresh herbs will last for weeks.
- If you're storing woody herbs, like thyme or rosemary, wrap them in a damp, reusable towel and store them for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.
- If your herbs start to lose freshness, chop them up, add plant-based oil, and freeze them in an ice-cube tray. The herb cubes can be added to soups or stews for a flavour boost.

### USE CLEAR CONTAINERS AND LABELS

- Store your food in clear storage containers, which allow you to see the contents easily and help you remember what's inside.
- Label containers with the date of storage to keep track of which ones need to be used up first.
- Leftovers should generally be used within two to three days.<sup>7</sup> If you don't plan on eating them within that time frame, store leftovers in the freezer to avoid waste.







## Tips for Stretching Your Meals with Plant-Based Foods

In addition to storing your plant-based foods so they last longer, using plant-based ingredients to stretch meals and your food budget while adding variety and nutrition is also important. Here are four tips for getting the most out of your food budget by adding plant-based foods.

### BULK UP MEALS WITH PULSES

Pulses (like lentils, chickpeas, and beans) are budget-friendly and packed with plant-based protein and fibre. Add pulses to soups, stews, chilli, and casseroles to increase the number of portions you get while increasing the nutritional value of your meals.

### USE WHOLE GRAINS AS STAPLE FOODS

Whole grains (like rice, quinoa, and whole wheat pasta) are affordable staples that you can use to stretch your meals. Incorporate them into your meals as a base or filler. Mix cooked grains with vegetables and a flavourful sauce for a quick stir-fry, or use them as a side dish for your main course.

### TRY TOFU AND TEMPEH

Tofu and tempeh are versatile plant-based protein options that can mimic the texture of meat. Marinate and stir-fry tofu, or crumble tempeh into chili or pasta sauce for a protein boost. Tofu and tempeh readily absorb flavours, making them great additions to many different dishes.

### MAKE USE OF LEFTOVERS

Turn yesterday's cooked vegetables, grains, or pulses into a new dish. Try blending leftover cooked vegetables into a soup or tossing them in a salad. Transform leftover grains into a grain bowl with fresh toppings and a tasty sauce.



## Easy Tips to Use Up Produce

There are many creative and easy ways to use up plant-based ingredients and help reduce food waste while stretching your food dollar.

### HERE ARE FIVE WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR PLANT-BASED INGREDIENTS:

#### SMOOTHIE BOWLS

If you notice fruits like bananas, berries, or avocados starting to get over-ripe, blend them with a plant-based beverage or yogurt to create smoothie bowls. Top with granola, nuts, seeds, and a drizzle of honey or maple syrup. This is a quick and easy way to use up fruit that is getting too soft. If you don't plan on eating the fruit promptly, chop it, put it in a clear freezer bag labeled with the date, and freeze it for use in your next smoothie bowl.

#### HOMEMADE VEGETABLE BROTH

The next time you're preparing a meal, save the vegetable scraps (like carrot peels, onion skins, celery leaves, and the stems of herbs) in a container in the freezer. Once you have enough scraps saved, simmer them in water to make a delicious homemade vegetable broth that can be used as a base for soups, stews, and sauces.

#### STIR-FRY OR FRIED RICE

Leftover cooked rice and vegetables that are starting to look past their prime can be transformed into a delicious stir fry or fried rice. Sauté the vegetables you need to use up with oil, garlic, ginger, and your choice of sauce (like low sodium soy sauce), then add the rice and stir-fry until heated through.

#### BEAN OR LENTIL PATTIES

Leftover cooked beans, lentils, or grains (like quinoa) can be turned into patties or burgers, along with vegetables that are nearing the end of their shelf life. Mash the beans, mix in spice and breadcrumbs, and add the chopped vegetables that need to be used up, then form into patties. Sauté in plant-based oil or bake until crispy, and serve in a bun or on a salad.

#### BAKE OR COOK

Overripe or slightly wilted fruits and vegetables can still be used in baking or cooking. Some easy ways to use up aging vegetables include vegetable fritters, savoury muffins, or veggie-packed casseroles. Wilted spinach can be sautéed with oil and garlic and used as a filling for omelettes. Overripe fruit such as bananas and apples can be used to bake banana bread or apple crisp.





## STUCK FOR IDEAS?

HERE ARE THREE RECIPES THAT ARE UTILIZE PLANT-BASED INGREDIENTS AND ARE DELICIOUS:



**HEARTY TWO-BEAN VEGETABLE CHILI**



**MINISTRONE SOUP**



**LENTIL AND MUSHROOM STEW**

With a few tweaks to your routine, you can ensure your plant-based ingredients stay fresh while helping you make the most of your food budget. Plant-based eating isn't just good for you - it also helps protect our environment.<sup>2</sup>



## SARAH GLINSKI

Sarah Glinski is a Registered Dietitian and holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Science in Food and Nutrition Sciences. She has experience in a wide variety of clinical areas, including adult weight management, kidney disease, diabetes, gut health, food relationship, and oncology. Sarah is currently a member of the 2024 Becel Centre for Heart Health Steering Committee, a team of registered dietitians working to create practical and relevant content.

<sup>1</sup> Salehin S, Rasmussen P, Mai S, Mushtaq M, Agarwal M, Hasan SM, Salehin S, Raja M, Gilani S, Khalife WI. Plant Based Diet and Its Effect on Cardiovascular Disease. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2023 Feb 14;20(4):3337. doi: 10.3390/ijerph20043337.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Ritchie (2020) - "You want to reduce the carbon footprint of your food? Focus on what you eat, not whether your food is local". Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved September 26, 2023 from: <https://ourworldindata.org/food-choice-vs-eating-local>.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada. Safe food storage. Retrieved September 26, 2023 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-food-storage.html#a5>

<sup>4</sup> EatRight.org. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Refrigerate - The Basics. Retrieved September 26, 2023 from <https://www.eatright.org/food/home-food-safety/safe-food-storage/refrigerate---the-basics>

<sup>5</sup> Preetha SS and Narayanan R. Factors Influencing the Development of Microbes in Food. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*. 2020. 7(3): 57-77.

<sup>6</sup> UCSD Community Health. Ethylene in Fruits and Vegetables. Retrieved September 26, 2023 from <https://ucsdcommunityhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ethylene.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada. Food safety tips for leftovers. Retrieved September 26, 2023 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/food-safety-tips-leftovers.html>

