



Family Activity List

Commit to completing at least one task or challenge each week from the list below



Garbage Sleuths

Teach your kids how to minimize household waste with a fun mystery game investigating trash. No need to get gross digging through real garbage; instead, set aside some trash items over a few days and set up a separate trash bin filled with different items your family often throws away, including some not-too-messy food scraps.

Let your kids put on their rubber gloves and start sorting through the mess. The object of the game is to discover items that could potentially be removed from the waste system, reducing the amount that ends up in landfills. When your child finds an item, have them explain an alternative to throwing it away—either by recycling, composting, or thinking through a waste-reducing alternative.

If you or they are unsure of where any particular item(s) are supposed to go try out [York Region's Bindicator tool!](#) Just type in the item and click search. The bindicator will let you know which stream of disposal the item goes to: compost/green bin, recycling or trash. Give it a try!



Grocery Store Scavenger Hunt

The grocery store is the perfect setting to learn about products that create waste and how to avoid them. On your next trip to the store, plan a waste-reduction scavenger hunt. Challenge your kids to find five items that yield too much waste and five alternatives to those items that generate less waste. Differences in snack and drink packaging, for example, are good hints. Don't forget to put them back when you're done!



Zero-Waste Challenge

Reducing waste is an entirely attainable goal. Challenge the whole family with a [Zero-Waste Challenge](#). Get everyone involved. Come up with ways to work towards producing zero waste. Consider using tea towels, replacing paper towels, make sure lights and faucets are turned off when leaving a room, make creative meals with leftovers... etc. The ideas are endless.

Challenge everyone to follow the waste-free rules you come up with for a week. You can decide on a reward for the family if the week is a success, like a fun family hike or special dinner. When the week is up, reflect together on how easy or difficult the changes were, and encourage one another to maintain your new habits... maybe even adding a new one each week moving forward!



Rescue these foods!

Bananas often find themselves in the bin after they've turned too brown and mushy to consume. Freeze them in their peel or store them peeled in a resealable bag for use in [banana bread](#) or [smoothies](#). Instead of tossing bruised apples, turn them into apple sauce using this [simple recipe](#). Wilting herbs like cilantro, dill or parsley can be thrown into your [frittata](#), or add them to soups, stocks, salads, salsas, marinades, pesto, rubs and more. Tomatoes going soft? Check out [this resource with loads of recipes](#) to give your tomatoes a longer life!



Food Waste Action Kit

Inspiring kids and youth around North America to prevent Food Waste and help save our planet! Activities in [the kit](#) are designed for youth across North America, from ages 5 to 25, to start making a positive difference right now to prevent food waste—from small initiatives at home to more ambitious efforts that involve the whole community. Activities in the kit are arranged in two groups—Part 1: Kids Action Kit for ages 5-13, and Part 2: Youth Action Kit for ages 14-25. There are dozens of inspiring ways for you to explore and discover how to prevent food waste—from organizing a Disco Soup party and learning food preservation techniques from elders, to building worm composters and solar dehydrators. Get started today.



Checklist

Print out [this checklist](#) and put it somewhere the whole family can see it. Practice these simple tips and watch the waste in your home shrink! Reflect each week together on the areas you succeeded at and make a plan/find new ideas for the areas where you struggled!



Portion control

Did you check out this week's resource on [Portion Control](#)? Try it out! Use smaller plates and serve smaller portions (with seconds available on request). Simple. Save food from getting wasted.



Use those scraps!

Throwing scraps into the green bin is better than the landfill but even better than that... start finding creative ways to cook with them or repurpose them instead. Here is a fun tool to find some recipes to ['Use Up What You've Got'](#)!



Check your fridge temperature

Keep your fridge at 37F. This extends the life of everything you bring home from the grocery store and the farmers' market and extends the life of all the stray bits you might have been tempted to toss, like the tops of fennel fronds and beet greens.



Practice FIFO (First In, First Out)

FIFO is a restaurant term, but it can also apply to the home. When unpacking groceries, shift the older foods to the front of the fridge, freezer or pantry and put new ones in the back. This prevents clutter, and you're more likely to use products before they expire.



Purge the Pantry Challenge

Trying to save money, it's hard to beat a grocery bill of \$0! Challenge yourself to skip the supermarket for a week and try to cook using solely what you already have at home.

Purging your pantry is a great way to save money and exercise a little culinary creativity.



Buy funny-looking produce

Many fruits and vegetables are thrown away by suppliers because of their odd sizes, shapes or colours. But real food doesn't always come in perfect packages. Don't shy away from buying these items at farmers' markets or grocery stores. Educate your family that food comes in all sorts of fun shapes and sizes and help use up food that might otherwise be thrown out as waste.



Support sustainable takeout

Home-cooked meals are not going to happen every night. The reality is you may want or need to order dinner at times. When you opt for takeout, you're likely to find yourself with an overwhelming amount of plastic containers afterward and often leftovers. Did you know that black plastic isn't recyclable?! That makes for a lot of waste. When you're ordering, consider supporting restaurants that use compostable or entirely recyclable containers, and always leave a note that you don't need cutlery and napkins. Make sure when ordering you are mindful of the amount you order. If you do have leftovers, make a plan to eat them within two days. Transform them into something new or heat them up for lunch tomorrow! Want to take it to the next level? Ask restaurants if you can bring in your own containers for them to pack your takeout.



Avoid buying oversize packages and skip the deals!

Don't be tempted by great deals that come in oversized packages at the grocery store/retailer unless you are confident your family will consume all of it before it expires. Only purchase in high volume if the ingredient has a long shelf life. If you do purchase a deal, make sure to plan for it and store it appropriately in your pantry, fridge or freezer. Also, make a point of looking for the least amount of packaging. If you end up with a bunch of cardboard boxes, we have crafts for that!



Watch a video

Take an hour and watch: Wasted: The Story of Food Waste video It is based in the USA but it well worth the watch!



Bulk up

Buying foods in bulk minimizes the amount of overall packaging you consume and allows you to control the quantity of food you want to store. You can shop just a few times a year for dry goods. It's cheaper, makes grocery shopping way less time consuming, and you'll rarely run out. Some places like Bulk Barn have even introduced a reusable container program, so you can have a zero-waste shopping experience.



Use up the entire produce

Keep veggies intact. We get in the habit of peeling most of our produce (think squash, potatoes, carrots and citrus fruits) and discarding the skin, but did you know that the peel contains most of the fibre and nutrients? Roast vegetables with the skin on, and zest lemons, limes and oranges to freeze and use later in muffins or salad dressings. Use up whole foods. Check out these [vegetables you can eat from root to stem](#).



Take stock

Take inventory of your pantry, fridge & freezer. Jot down what's there. By taking stock, you use up the good food on hand. Make a meal plan for the week and shopping list based on only what's needed. Don't spend more than you need to or let good food expire!



Store properly in reusable containers

Once you start buying only what you need, take it to the next level by storing food properly, which will extend its life and keep things fresh for as long as possible. Invest in some quality airtight containers for things like baking ingredients, cereals, and other things that can stale quickly. If you buy loose food items from farmer's markets or bulk bins reusable containers are especially important to have in your kitchen.



The freezer is your friend

It's common to forget about the fresh produce about to expire in the fridge. If you notice that some ingredients are starting to bruise or wilt, freeze them. Most fruits and vegetables can be frozen, then used in smoothies, soups and stews at a later date. It's best to first freeze fruits or vegetables in a single layer on a baking sheet, then transfer them to reusable containers.



Make a meal plan

Food waste is a huge problem in Canadian Households. However, it's entirely preventable if consumers follow one simple rule: only buy groceries that you have a plan to eat. It sounds like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised at how much food is actually thrown out in Canada. You don't have to plan out EVERY meal. Start small with two or three meals a week. Look at what you already have on hand in your fridge, freezer or pantry and build from there. It's important when making a meal plan, to remember to plan for leftovers. Before you know it, your food waste and grocery bills will shrink noticeably! Give it a shot.



Stop using disposable plates

Even if washing the dishes is the bane of your existence, the waste created by paper plates and plastic utensils isn't worth it. Stop resorting to paper and plastic and get those hands dirty.



Start composting

Every day, a large amount of what you throw into the trash or even green bin could be composted and returned to the earth (like veggie peels/scraps). There are many easy ways to compost. Find which one works best for you! Your excess food won't go to waste, your garden, plants and the earth will be full of nutrients and you can feel better about your impact on the planet. Win, win, win.



Learn the rules of recycling

Don't be intimidated by the complicated symbols and sorting rules. Navigating the recycling system is actually quite simple with a little research. Since recycling standards vary from place to place, find out the specific rules for your area.

While it's better to implement reusable packaging in your home wherever possible, recycling is the next best choice, and it will prevent excess waste from heading for the landfill.

A lot of your waste can be reused or recycled through curbside collection, community donation centres and waste depots. If you're unsure of where any particular items are supposed to go, try out York Region's tool the Bindicator. Just type in the item and click search. The Bindicator will let you know which stream of disposal is best; compost/green bin, recycling or trash. Give it a try!



Ditch the plastic bags

One of the simplest ways to decrease the amount of waste you produce is to use reusable bags while shopping. Instead of relying on your supermarket's plastic bags, bring your own cloth ones to pack up your items and tote them home. Keeping a bunch of extra bags in the trunk of your car or right by the door is an easy way to make sure you don't forget them at home. Use reusable bags—for produce too



Ditch disposables in the kitchen

Paper towels, plastic wrap, paper napkins, sandwich bags, oh my! Use up your stash and quit buying them. Try using a silicone baking sheet in place of tinfoil or parchment. Keep a big bowl of clean cloths on the counter, then throw into a laundry bin placed within reach. Get cloth napkins from thrift stores. Find what works for you and make the switch!



Replace dryer sheets with reusable dryer balls

Use wool dryer balls (which you can spray with essential oils) instead of dryer sheets. Dryer balls actually reduce the drying time by soaking up water. Store-bought balls last for upwards of 500 washes, or you can make your own with wool you have stashed at home with this dryer ball DIY!



Make a questionables bin

If you're unsure of how to dispose of something or have batteries or bulbs that can be recycled but need to go to a special facility, put them in a bin and deal with them altogether once a year. That way you aren't tempted to trash them improperly. When the year is over, you can deal with all of them, which will take far less time than disposing of batteries one by one. * Special note for battery disposal



Repair rather than discard

When was the last time you repaired something broken rather than throw it away to purchase a new one? Can't remember? Same. Buying a few high-quality items and repairing them when necessary is so much better for the planet than buying loads of cheap, disposable stuff!

The next time a strap pops off of a tank top or a lamp stops working, spend a few minutes to see if it's fixable, rather than throwing it in the garbage and ordering a new one. There are some wonderful pop ups that were in play prior to COVID that we hope will start up again soon like the [Repair Café](#). The Repair Café is an event where people can bring a variety of household items to be fixed for free. Whether you're unsure how to do the repair, don't have the space or the right tools, the Repair Café offers a solution. [Volunteer fixers](#) are available to assess your needs and will do their best to fix your items including bicycles, jewellery, sewing needs (small tears and repairs), small appliances, toys.



Change up your coffee/beverage game

Water bottles and paper coffee cups are huge wastes of material. Both are a pretty big offenders of the one-use-disposal eco-crime. Coffee cups are NOT recyclable because of the coating on the inside of the cups (face palm). Invest in either a travel mug or use a jar from home if you are going to purchase single coffees. It can be as simple as a mason jar with a drinking lid and sleeve. Take your beverages wherever you please. You'll find yourself feeling a lot more hydrated and a lot less wasteful.



Switch to paperless billing

Account statements often tend to pile up at the front door (along with kids' artwork, notes from daycare and restaurant flyers). Spend one evening switching all of your billing to electronic. Make sure you move the email contacts to a "safe list" so they don't get lost in a spam folder. When they come in, mark them as "important," then uncheck them once they're paid. Mark your calendar each month and deal with all of them at once. Clickety-click!



Cancel any unnecessary mail!

If your physical mailbox is overloaded with catalogs and junk mail each day, take a few minutes to cancel subscriptions and [stop unsolicited junk mail](#). It can be as simple as putting a note on your mailbox stating that you do not wish to receive Canada Post Neighbourhood Mail. Cancelling subscriptions to things like the weekly area's paper may be a bit of an inconvenience, sure, but your coffee table will be less cluttered and the amount of paper waste you produce will be cut significantly!



Join buy-and-sell groups

You might be surprised that someone could be interested in that old Baby Bullet you never use anymore and will come to your house to pick it up and leave you money, but they are, and they will! When you sell something you don't use anymore, you keep the item out of the landfill, you stop someone from having to buy new and you pocket some cash. Totally worth it! In addition to joining buy-and-sell groups, take advantage of resources in your city like tool-share programs.