

Cooking Meals Sustainably is Easy and helps Save the Planet

Every day, what we eat and the way we prepare meals have far bigger impacts on the environment than we might expect. By cooking and eating more sustainably, we can actually reduce climate change and live a healthier life.

Sustainability Starts with Shopping Right

It might seem that actions such as changing the way we shop or cook are too small to have much effect on climate change. Each of us can do our part, though, and collectively make a huge difference.

Cooking sustainably starts with shopping. And along with being better for the planet, shopping more carefully can help you save money.

The first step is to check your cupboards and refrigerator, then create a shopping list for what you actually need. Only buy the items on your list rather than being lured into spending on special deals or buying promoted items you may not need. If you buy extra, you're more likely to waste some food.

When you shop, look for foods that are grown or produced closer to home, to reduce emissions from transport. While Australian carrots or South African apples might seem exotic or tasty, for example, there are plenty of other options grown closer to home that are equally good or better. Local options can be fresher and tastier. Choosing products with less packaging is more eco-friendly too.

Also consider buying less of foods that create more carbon emissions. Raising animals for meat, for example, generates nearly 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. While becoming a vegan is best, shifting to meatless Mondays and using less meat in other meals makes a difference. Giving up beef once a week in favour of beans is equal to using about 172 fewer litres of petrol a year, columnist Tamar Haspel explained in the Washington Post.

Cheese is third on the list of highest emissions behind lamb and beef, according to the Environmental Working Group, and producing 450 grams of cheese creates about 60 kilograms of carbon emissions. If you do eat cheese, consider serving it for special occasions and enjoy an artisan cheese.

A helpful tool is [Impact Score](#), which provides sustainability information about thousands of products and can tell you anything from whether the packaging is recyclable to whether ingredients were sourced responsibly.

And take reusable bags when you shop. Most produce, including onions and citrus, will be washed or peeled before being consumed anyway, so it can go straight into your shopping bag.

How you Cook makes a Difference

Some of the best ways to cook with little or no waste, Sustainability Victoria suggests, are to cook with a meal plan, get creative to use up ingredients and cook the right amount.

When you look at ingredients in your kitchen, realise that sell-by, best-by, use-by, enjoy-by and best-if-used-before dates do not have precise definitions and are often based on the manufacturer's concerns about food freshness rather than safety. Products should be safe until you can see spoilage if it is handled properly, according to the US Department of Agriculture, so take a closer look rather than disposing of ingredients based on dates that may not be accurate.

If you do cook meat, one of the easiest ways to eat less is to downsize a meat entrée to a side dish and make veggies the main course for the meal, chef Amanda Cohen told Cooking Light. Her trick to eating more veggies is to make them taste better, even if it means something like frying eggplant or buttering peas.

When you use pots and pans to cook a meal, put lids on them to trap the heat and use less energy. Choosing the right-sized hob, choosing the correct pans so they are full and placing the pans in the middle of the hobs on the stove helps make sure energy isn't wasted. These simple steps can save about 3 percent of your energy costs, according to UK-based Feastbox.

And when you make coffee, a French press or a reusable mesh filter for an electric coffeemaker is better than a paper filter.

Be Eco-Friendly After the Meal Too

While fresh-cooked meals are great, eating leftovers reduces food waste and saves money – and some foods taste even better later. You can store food safely in your refrigerator for a short while and freeze anything you cannot eat soon. Food waste would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gasses after China and the United States if waste were a country, conservation non-profit WWF noted, so avoiding waste makes a big difference.

When you wash the dishes, choose eco-friendly cleaning products such as sponges made from recycled materials and biodegradable soaps. If you wash dishes by hand, install a low-flow device in the faucet and don't let the faucet run, so that you can save water. If you have a two-compartment sink, fill one side with soapy water to wash dishes and the other side with clean water to rinse them.

And if you do need to throw food away, consider purchasing biodegradable trash bags.

Cook Well

While cooking sustainably might have seemed daunting, it's actually easy. The choices you make can benefit your pocketbook, your health and the planet.