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Food storage tips to help make your food last longer

Follow our simple food storage tips for more flavoursome food, less wastage and less chance of harmful bacteria in your fridge

 Christina Woodger
Senior researcher & writer



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It's easy to let food go off and then find yourself having to throw it away. Although you can try to avoid this, UK homes waste 4.5m tonnes annually, estimates climate action from the Waste and Recycling Action Programme.

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With food inflation so high, throwing spoiled food away feels particularly painful. It also wastes energy and water. Sending food to landfill also produces methane, a harmful greenhouse gas.

We've rounded up food storage tips to help keep your groceries fresher for longer.

A good fridge freezer can help. Our guide to the [best fridge freezers](#) will help you decide what type to buy.

Make sure your fridge freezer is cold enough

Your fridge freezer won't set itself to the correct temperatures automatically - you'll need to follow the instructions in the manual.

- The temperature in your fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C.
- The temperature in your freezer should be between -18°C and -20°C.
- The Food Standards Agency (FSA) says that 8°C-60 °C is the **danger zone**: in other words, food is safest when it is chilled below 8°C or heated beyond 60°C.
- Between these temperatures, unsafe levels of bacteria begin to grow (above this temperature, they begin to die).

Surprisingly, however, the manufacturer's recommendation won't always get your fridge freezer to the appropriate temperature and can actually be way off what's claimed.

The wilted leafy greens in the right-hand image here were stored in a fridge for the same time as those in the centre image - just three days.

The difference is that the wilted ones were stored at an average temperature of 6°C, while the fresher-looking ones were at 3°C.

In our tests, the manufacturer's recommended setting in the worst models sent the fridge temperature soaring above 10°C - into the danger zone.



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Some fridge freezers start accurately enough but stop maintaining the correct temperature over time. In fact, this was the most common fault reported in our 2023 survey of 7,000 fridge freezer owners. Find out [which fridge freezer brands are most reliable?](#)

To make sure your salad stays crisper for longer, check our reviews for models that score five stars for thermostat reliability

Is your cold appliance correctly set? See [What temperature should a fridge be?](#) and [What temperature should a freezer be?](#) to find out more.

Pick the best shelf for the food type

Even if your fridge's thermostat is reliable, the temperature will be an average for the fridge as a whole, because different parts of the fridge are colder than others.

- **Butter and cheese** are less perishable, so they can be kept near the top of your fridge, where it's warmer.
- **Condiments** can also go on the higher shelves.
- **Leftovers, ready-to-eat foods** such as soup, cooked meats and pizza should go on a middle shelf.
- **Fruit** that needs to be separated from vegetables because of the ethylene it produces can also go on a middle shelf (more on this later).
- **Raw meat, fish and seafood** should be kept on the bottom shelf or, if your fridge has one, a chill compartment that's specially designed for this purpose. At between 0°C and 3°C, this will lock in freshness and prevent harmful bacteria from growing. Take meat, fish and seafood out of the fridge 30 minutes before you want to cook it, though, as this should help it cook more evenly.

[How to organise your fridge](#) - watch our video to find out how best to do this

Store fruit and veg at the correct humidity

Your fruit and veg will stay edible and tasty for longer if you store them at the correct humidity as well as temperature.

- **Vegetables** tend to like high humidity, while most fruits prefer low. If you have a humidity switch on your fridge drawers, make sure you switch it to high humidity for veg and low humidity for fruit. If you don't have a switch, or only have one drawer, it's best to keep your veg in the drawer as that tends to prevent moisture from escaping and is therefore more humid. Fruit can then go on a middle shelf in your fridge.
- **You shouldn't store fruit in a drawer that contains vegetables.** It's likely to produce ethylene, a natural gas that can over-ripen other fresh food when trapped in a confined space. This isn't a blanket rule, though. Mushrooms also produce ethylene, while apples and watermelons are fruits that are sensitive to the effects of ethylene.

To see why humidity is so important, take a look at these images.

In the left image you can see the contents of a pack of strawberries and raspberries when new (a stock image)

The centre image, which we took during our testing, shows strawberries and raspberries after two weeks stored at a low average relative humidity. The right hand side image, which we took, shows strawberries and raspberries shown for the same length of time at a high average relative humidity.



When salad crisper drawers work well and are used properly they keep their contents between 0°C and 4°C, which helps keep groceries fresher for longer.

That's why, in 2023, we added an assessment of salad crisper drawers (aka fruit and vegetable drawers) to our fridge freezer and fridge tests. We now test how warm these drawers get and whether they'll dry groceries out.

Check the technical specification in our reviews to find out if a model has humidity-controllable drawers.

Considering a veg subscription service? Discover the [best fruit and veg boxes](#).

Don't keep your fridge freezer in a garage or outbuilding

Most [fridge freezers](#) aren't designed to be kept in extremely low temperatures, and doing so could invalidate your warranty.

However there are a handful of models that manufacturers say are designed to be kept in room temperatures as low as -15°C.

All other fridge freezers are likely to struggle to maintain a safe and stable temperature in these conditions, which could be unsafe.

Our tests also reveal that some models can't keep a steady temperature when the temperature in your kitchen rises during a heatwave.

See our guide to the [best freezers and chest freezers for garages](#) to learn more about keeping cold appliances in unheated spaces.

Don't stack food too high

Avoid packing your fridge so full that food on one shelf is touching the shelf above.

This can prevent cool air from circulating, pushing up the temperature in parts of the fridge, making it work harder (using more energy) and causing food to perish sooner.

As part of our tests, we measure usable volume so you know exactly how much storage space you're actually getting compared with what the manufacturer claims. The worst appliances give you 34% less storage space than you'd been led to believe.

Head to our [fridge freezer reviews](#) to pick out a model that's big enough for your needs.

Don't waste valuable space. Find out which types of [food you shouldn't store in the fridge](#).

Keep food in its packaging

Keep your food in its original packaging whenever possible, as it will almost certainly have been designed with food freshness and preservation in mind.

This is especially true of vacuum-packed meat but also applies to fruit and veg, where strategically placed air holes can make a big difference to shelf life.

Read more about [common food storage mistakes](#).

Let leftovers cool to room temperature

Regardless of whether they're going in the fridge or the freezer, you should always let leftovers cool to room temperature before putting them inside your fridge freezer.

Otherwise, the warmth of your recently cooked food will send the temperature in your fridge and freezer skyrocketing.

Not only will that reduce the freshness of other food in the fridge – which needs to be kept at a stable temperature – it will also force your fridge freezer to work harder to cool down, pushing up your energy bills.

See our pick of the [best energy-efficient fridge freezers](#).

Don't dawdle with the door open



It's easy to underestimate how much hot air enters your fridge freezer each time you open the door. This hot air will add to your energy bills, as the fridge freezer works harder to cool it down.

Leaving the door open for an extended period could also impact your food's shelf life.

Read more about the [best energy-efficient fridges](#) and the [best energy-efficient freezers](#).

Use super-cool and fast-freeze settings when needed

Food destined for the fridge should be chilled as quickly as possible to avoid it spending too long in the danger zone of 8°C–60°C.

Freezing food quickly rather than slowly also prevents large ice crystals from forming, causing less damage to cell membranes and preserving taste and quality.

The faster your fridge and freezer are able to get food down to these temperatures, the better.

More fridge freezers now have super-cool and fast-freeze settings.

Although you shouldn't use these settings too much, as they will use more energy, you could use them when unpacking food from a particularly big shop. This is when your fridge and freezer will have to work hardest to cool back down, so these settings will give them a helping hand.

Our reviews separate the models that chill and freeze quickly from those that do it slowly. The fastest we tested cooled our test load in five and a half hours, while the slowest took 48 hours.

Find out [how to stock your freezer to avoid food waste](#).

Use smart features if your appliance has them

Smart fridge freezers don't come cheap and certainly aren't a necessity, but there are a couple of ways they could help keep your food fresher.

For example, some have internal cameras that send images of what's inside your fridge to your smartphone. While this won't keep your existing food any fresher, it does mean you're less likely to buy more fresh fruit and veg unnecessarily because you didn't realise you already had some to eat up at home.

Some smart fridge freezers can also keep tabs on how long your food has been in there, reminding you to eat it while it's still fresh or because it's about to go out of date.

Find out more about [fridge freezer smart features](#).

Plan ahead to avoid food waste

Over 4 in 10 (44%) of 2,067 UK adults we surveyed in 2023 said that they consistently or often reduce food waste through careful planning, composting or recycling. If you're among the 56% who don't, there's no time like the present to start.

Regardless of whether you use smart tools or do it manually, planning meals in advance can help you eat more healthily. A [study into meal planning habits in France](#) found that participants who planned meals in advance had a more varied and nutritionally balanced diet and were less likely to be overweight.

There are various meal planning apps available, some of which are free to download. If this feels like too much effort, Less Waste, run by the Leicestershire Waste Partnership, suggests at the very least taking a quick photo of what's in your fridge (a 'shelfie') before you go food shopping. You can refer to it as you walk round, to avoid buying duplicates of things you already have.

Other ways to avoid food waste include:

- Educating yourself on the difference between [best-before and use-by dates](#)
- Cleaning your fridge freezer, particularly if you've just had a clear-out of gone-off food. Bacteria can contaminate the other foods in your fridge, making them spoil faster and risking making you sick.
- Getting creative with leftovers. Love Food Hate Waste also has some great [recipe ideas for leftovers](#)
- Some food, such as citrus peel and onions, can be composted. Find out [what can and can't be composted](#).

Discover the tactics supermarkets use to get you to spend more in [how to spend less at the supermarket](#).

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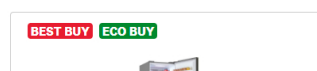
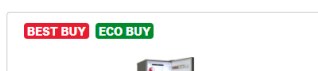
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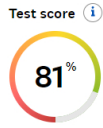
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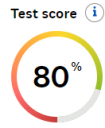




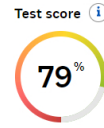
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