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# Earth Action: Cook Ahead



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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Earth911 is honoring the 52 years of Earth Day with 52 Actions for the Earth. Each week through Earth Day 2023, we will share an action you can take to [invest in the Earth](#) and make your own life more sustainable. It's nearly impossible to cook every day. But take-out and frozen foods have a lot of environmental drawbacks. This week, you can take action for the Earth by cooking ahead.

## Action: Cook Ahead

### The Problem With Quick Dinners

Processed foods have a [big environmental impact](#). Frozen dinners [are often less healthy](#) than food cooked at home, and meals prepared at restaurants [usually are too](#). Frozen foods – even the ones in cardboard boxes – generate a lot of [nonrecyclable plastic packaging](#) and are also energy-intensive, requiring refrigeration along the [distribution chain](#) from the manufacturer to the grocery store to your [home freezer](#). Life cycle analysis has confirmed that homemade meals have a [much smaller footprint](#) than industrially prepared meals.

[Take-out containers](#) generate a lot of waste. Food is wrapped in plastic or aluminum foil, then placed into paper, plastic, or [Styrofoam](#) containers, and then put into paper bags and/or plastic bags for carrying. Besides the [packaging](#)

### What Do You Think?

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- Yes

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[waste](#), take-out generates waste with plastic cutlery, wooden chopsticks, disposable napkins and straws, and individual sauce and seasoning packets. Nearly all of it ends up in the landfill. Restaurant [food loss rates](#) are high, and more food is wasted as customers throw away uneaten portions of oversized restaurant meals. Take-out also generates greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, either by you or a delivery driver.

## The Benefits of Home Cooking

When you store food prepared in your own home, you can choose reusable containers like [glass jars](#) and other [plastic-free options](#). Cooking at home gives you more control over portion size, which reduces food waste. [Planning ahead](#) reduces food waste further. When you cook at home and freeze or refrigerate leftovers, you only [keep food frozen](#) for a few days and no extra car trips are required for take-out or delivery. Cooking ahead gives you the benefits of homemade without the inconvenience.

## Cooking Ahead

Some people like to take an afternoon on the weekend to prep meals for the whole week. But if you don't like spending such a big block of time in the kitchen or think a week of pre-cooked meals feels like a week of leftovers, there are less extreme options. It only takes a few minutes reviewing your schedule to see which days you'll have time to cook and when you'll be too busy. Cook double batches on less busy days (which also [makes your stove more efficient](#)) and eat leftovers the other days.

If you're not a fan of leftover dinners, try the "overlapping ingredients" method of weekly meal planning. For example, you might roast a whole chicken the first day. Chop up leftover chicken and extra vegetables to make a salad the next day, then use the extra pre-cut vegetables for quick tacos on day three.

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By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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