How to reduce food waste in a restaurant kitchen.



THE SHORT ANSWER

Start by weighing what you throw away for one week, so you know where the waste is. Then order closer to use, store each item in the right place, use the oldest stock first and plan dishes that use trim. Most kitchens find the biggest losses in greens, herbs and overproduction.

Why it is worth the effort

Every tomato that goes in the bin was paid for twice: once to buy it and once in the time spent storing, sorting and throwing it away. In a kitchen buying fresh produce every week, a little waste each day adds up to real money by the end of the month.

It is a national problem too. Kenya's 2024–2028 postharvest strategy cites an estimated KSh 72 billion lost each year in selected crop value chains, and World Resources Institute research from 2025 cites an estimate of 30 to 40% of food lost or wasted between production and consumption. Kitchens are the last link in that chain. We set out these figures and their sources on our impact page.

Start by measuring the bin

You cannot cut waste you have not seen. Kitchens that guess usually guess wrong: they blame the supplier when most of the waste is overproduction, or blame portions when most of it is spoiled greens.

For one normal week, sort and weigh what you throw away.

BIN	WHAT GOES IN IT	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
Spoiled	Stock that went off before it was used	Ordering too much, or storing it in the wrong place
Prep trim	Peels, stems, cores and offcuts	Prep habits, and which trim could be used
Overproduction	Food cooked or prepped but not sold	Forecasting and batch sizes
Plate waste	Food left by customers	Portion sizes and dishes people do not finish

A kitchen scale, four labelled buckets and a sheet on the wall are enough. Write the weight of each bin at the end of every shift. After a week, the biggest number tells you where to start.

Order closer to use

The cheapest way to cut spoilage is to hold less stock. Split your produce into two kinds of order.

Weekly order

- Onions, potatoes, carrots
- Cabbage, ginger, garlic
- Firm fruit that ripens on the shelf

Two or three times a week

- Sukuma, spinach, managu, terere
- Dhania, mint and other soft herbs
- Ripe tomatoes, berries, cut fruit

Order from your covers, not from habit. Look at last week's sales for the same day, adjust for events and holidays, and order to that number with a small buffer. Check this week's prices as you plan: when an item is expensive, plan dishes that need less of it.

Wapishi delivers at times agreed with you, with early-morning and night deliveries on request, so fresh items can arrive just before prep starts. Order in the Wapishi shop. The minimum order is KSh 5,000, so pair the greens and herbs with staples you need anyway.

Store it so it lasts

A lot of spoilage is storage. Tomatoes in the cold room go mealy, potatoes stored with onions sprout, and greens next to bananas turn yellow. Our storage guide covers where every item belongs. Three rules do most of the work:

- ☐ **Right place.** Greens and herbs cold, roots and onions dry and dark, ripening fruit on the counter.
- ☐ **First in, first out.** Date every crate, put new stock behind old, keep a "use today" tray.
- ☐ **Check on delivery.** Damaged or warm produce spoils first. Check deliveries before you sign and report problems the same day.

Use more of what you buy

Trim is food you have already paid for. Some of it belongs in the bin. A lot of it does not.

LEFTOVER	USE IT FOR
Onion, carrot, celery and leek trim	Stock. Keep a clean container in the cold room and cook stock twice a week.
Dhania and herb stems	Sauces, marinades, green chutney, stock
Soft or overripe tomatoes	Tomato sauce, stews, soup bases
Overripe bananas, mangoes, pawpaw	Juices, smoothies, banana bread, fruit sauces
Broccoli and cauliflower stems	Peel and slice into stir-fries and soups
Cooked but unsold rice and vegetables	Staff meals, if they were held safely

> Only reuse food that has been held at safe temperatures. When in doubt, throw it out. Saving a tray of rice is never worth a sick customer.

Plates and portions

If the plate-waste bin is heavy, look at which dishes come back half-eaten. A side of sukuma nobody touches or a mountain of rice is a portion problem, not a customer problem. Try smaller standard portions with refills on request, and ask the waiting staff what customers leave.

What cannot be used

Some waste is unavoidable: peels, cores, spoiled produce. Keep it separate from other rubbish. Clean vegetable and fruit scraps can be composted, and you may find an urban farmer or livestock keeper near you who will take them. Agree what they can use before you start setting it aside.

Check again in a month

Repeat the one-week bin count a month after you make changes. Put the before and after figures where the team can see them. People waste less when they can see the number go down.

Quick answers

Where does most food waste come from in a restaurant?

It differs by kitchen, which is why measuring comes first. Common sources are spoiled stock, prep trim, food cooked but not sold, and food left on plates.

How do I measure food waste in a kitchen?

Put separate bins or buckets for spoilage, prep trim, overproduction and plate waste, and weigh each at the end of every shift for a week. A simple kitchen scale and a sheet on the wall is enough.

Does ordering more often cost more?

Not necessarily. Smaller, more frequent orders of greens and herbs often cost less overall, because less spoils before it is used. Firm items such as onions and potatoes can still be bought weekly.

What can I do with vegetable trim?

Clean trim from onions, carrots, celery and leeks makes stock. Herb stems go into sauces and marinades. Overripe tomatoes go into sauce, and overripe fruit into juice. What cannot be used can be composted.

Buying for a kitchen in Nairobi?

Wapishi supplies fresh produce and kitchen staples to restaurants, hotels, caterers and canteens. Prices are published every week, and the latest version of this guide is online.

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