

Get Ready for the Spring Thaw – Regain your Refrigerator

Here's a different sort of spring thaw and one you can do yourself. Get prepared to clean out your fridge and freezer. This process is a hot idea with refrigerator rules that will save you money and time.

1. **Start now** by making a commitment to buy fewer grocery items and eat as much as possible of what is already in your fridge and freezer. Schedule a date as the day you will clean your refrigerator and try not to purchase too much before then. Look at your calendar and find a day and time that you have nothing else planned, preferably the day before garbage pick-up day. Make sure you allow enough time on the day you have picked, to complete your project.
2. **Be prepared.** Have plenty of extra large, heavy-duty trash bags on hand and have your recycling and composting containers nearby.
3. **Let things go.** When you start to clean out the refrigerator you may be left with food that is too old to eat or that you haven't chosen to eat. Maybe it's just time to let it go. If your poultry is petrified, your sauces are science projects, or if you can't remember when you bought it—toss it. Check the expiration dates. Pay attention to foods and condiments that weren't eaten, and consider this when grocery shopping for these items in the future.
4. **Take everything out** for a good cleaning and use a cooler to store while you clean. It's spring and you will need to get those coolers out anyway.
5. **Get rid of** the old ice in the ice trays and give the trays a good washing.
6. **Put like things together.** Create sections for different types of foods—beverages, veggies, fruit, cheese and deli meats, dairy, other meats.
7. **Think proper storage.** Meat and poultry should be stored in the center back where it stays the coolest. Condiments are fine in the door where temperature fluctuates. Vegetables are best in the crisper with higher levels of humidity. Use clear containers for leftovers, or repackaged items, and label with the date so you know what it is and when it was put there. Square containers are better than round, as they waste less space.
8. **Know what you actually eat and** when. We may not notice it but we often eat seasonally. So, just like switching over our closet, we need to change over our refrigerator contents as well. Our spring and summer eating styles tends to change to more fresh produce and barbecue items and there may also be some adjustments when the kids get out of school.
9. **Take out the trash.** Immediately put that trash bag outside for the collection.

This spring thaw will give you a clean refrigerator with foods that can be easily found, last longer through proper storage techniques, and create more room for easy access.

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Colette Robicheau, President of Organize Anything, is a consultant, coach, and public speaker offering corporate, residential, and personal organizing services. For more information contact Colette Robicheau, Organizing Consultant and Coach visit her website www.organizeanything.com or email info@organizeanything.com.