

## **SUSTAINABLE LIVING GUIDE:**

### **41. FIFTY WAYS TO NEVER WASTE FOOD AGAIN<sup>1</sup>**

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“Use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without” is a favorite adage in both frugal and green circles, and it is something I strive to live by. One of the best ways to “use it up” is to think differently about our food and ways to avoid wasting it. Lloyd wrote a great post a while back about the statistics for how much food we waste in the U.S., and the numbers are, frankly, appalling. On average, we waste 14 percent of our food purchases per year, and the average American family throws out over 600 dollars of fruit per year. Most of the food we waste is due to spoilage; we’re buying too much and using too little of it. We’ve all had it happen: half the loaf of bread goes stale because no one wants to eat sandwiches today, and the grapes we bought as healthy snacks for the kids’ lunches languish in the crisper. With a little creativity, and an eye toward vanquishing waste in our lives, we can make use of more of our food before it goes to waste. Here are a few ideas for you.

#### **Using Up Vegetables**

- (1) Leftover mashed potatoes from dinner? Make them into patty shapes the next morning and cook them in butter for a pretty good “mock hash brown.”
- (2) Don’t toss those trimmed ends from onions, carrots, celery, or peppers. Store them in your freezer, and once you have a good amount saved up, add them to a large pot with a few cups of water and make homemade vegetable broth. This is also a great use for cabbage cores and corn cobs.
- (3) Don’t toss broccoli stalks. They can be peeled and sliced, then prepared just like broccoli florets.
- (4) If you have to dice part of an onion or pepper for a recipe, don’t waste the rest of it. Chop it up and store it in the freezer for the next time you need diced onion or peppers.
- (5) Roasted root vegetable leftovers can be turned into an easy, simple soup the next day. Add the veggies to a blender, along with enough broth or water to thin them enough to blend. Heat and enjoy.
- (6) If you’re preparing squash, don’t toss the seeds. Rinse and roast them in the oven, just like you would with pumpkin seeds. The taste is pretty much the same.
- (7) Celery leaves usually get tossed. There’s a lot of good flavor in them; chop them up and add them to meatloaf, soups, or stews.
- (8) Use up tomatoes before they go bad by drying them in the oven. You can then store them in olive oil in the refrigerator (if you plan on using them within a week) or in the freezer.
- (9) Canning is always a good option. If you’re doing tomatoes, you can use a boiling water bath. If you’re canning any other type of veggie, a pressure canner is necessary for food safety.
- (10) Before it goes bad, blanch it and toss it in the freezer. This works for peas, beans, corn, carrots, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, and leafy greens like spinach and kale.
- (11) Too many zucchini? Make dark chocolate zucchini cake, zucchini bread or muffins. If you don’t want to eat the bread now, bake it and freeze it, then defrost when you’re ready to eat it.
- (12) Pickle it. Cucumbers are the first veggie most of us think of pickling, but in reality, just about any vegetable can be preserved through pickling.

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<sup>1</sup> Planet Green, October 14, 2009

### **Ideas for Cutting Down on Fruit Waste**

- (13) Make smoothies with fruit before it goes bad. Berries, bananas, and melons are great candidates for this use-up idea.
- (14) Jam is really easy to make, and will keep for up to a year if you process the jars in a hot water bath. If you don't do the water processing part, you can keep the jam in the refrigerator for a month, which is a lot longer than the fruits would have lasted.
- (15) Dry your fruit and store it in the freezer or in airtight containers.
- (16) Make fruit leather.
- (17) Make a big fruit salad or "fruit kebabs" for your kids. For some reason, they seem to eat more fruit if it's in these "fancier" forms.
- (18) Use up the fall bounty of apples by making applesauce or apple butter.
- (19) Don't throw out those watermelon rinds! Pickled watermelon rind is a pretty tasty treat.
- (20) Make a fruit crumble out of almost any fruit you have on hand. Assemble and bake it now, or leave it unbaked and store it in the freezer for a quick dessert.

### **Putting Extra Grains to Good Use**

- (21) Make croutons out of day-old bread.
- (22) Turn day-old bread into homemade bread crumbs.
- (23) Freeze leftover bread. This way you'll have day-old on hand whenever you need bread crumbs, or croutons rather than using fresh bread.
- (24) All of those little broken pieces of pasta in the bottom of the box? Collect them and mix with rice and veggies for a simple side dish.
- (25) A few tablespoons of leftover oatmeal isn't enough for a meal, but it is great sprinkled on top of yogurt.
- (26) Add chopped bread to a soup. It will dissolve and thicken the soup.
- (27) Made too many pancakes for breakfast? Put them in the freezer, then toss in the toaster for a fast, tasty weekday breakfast. Ditto waffles.
- (28) If you make plain white or brown rice with dinner, use leftovers for breakfast the next morning by adding them to oatmeal. This provides extra fiber and allows you to use up that rice.
- (29) If you or your kids don't like the bread crusts on your sandwiches, save these bits and pieces in the freezer to turn into bread crumbs later. Just throw the crusts into a food processor or coffee grinder to make them into crumbs. Season as you like.
- (30) If you have just a smidge of baby cereal left in the box, and it's not enough for a full meal, add it to your babies pureed fruit. It adds bulk and fiber, and keeps baby full longer.

### **Make the Most of Meat**

- (31) Don't toss those chicken bones after you eat the chicken. Boil them to make chicken stock.
- (32) Ditto for bones from beef and pork.
- (33) The fat you trim from beef can be melted down and turned into suet for backyard birds.
- (34) Turn leftover bits of cooked chicken into chicken salad for sandwiches the next day.
- (35) Use leftover roast beef or pot roast in an easy vegetable beef soup the next day by adding veggies, water, and the cooking juices from the meat.

### **Use Dairy Before It Expires**

- (36) If you've got a few chunks of different types of cheese sitting around after a party, make macaroni and cheese.
- (37) Eggs can be frozen. Break them, mix the yolks and whites together, and pour into an ice cube tray. Two frozen egg cubes is the equivalent of one large egg.
- (38) You can also freeze milk. Leave enough room in the container for expansion, and defrost in the refrigerator.
- (39) Use cream cheese in mashed potatoes or white sauces to give them thickness and tang.
- (40) Put Parmesan cheese into the food processor with day-old bread to make Parmesan bread crumbs. This is excellent as a coating for eggplant slices, pork, or chicken.

### **Herbs and How to Get the Most Out of Them**

- (41) Chop herbs and add them to ice cube trays with just a little water. Drop whole cubes into the pan when a recipe calls for that type of herb.
- (42) You can also freeze herbs by placing them in plastic containers. Certain herbs, such as basil, will turn black, but the flavor will still be great.
- (43) Make pesto with extra basil or parsley.
- (44) Dry herbs by hanging them by their stems in a cool, dry location. Once they're dry, remove them from the stems and store them in airtight containers.

### **Don't Waste a Drop**

- (45) Leftover coffee in the carafe? Freeze it in ice cube trays. Use the cubes for iced coffee or to cool down too-hot coffee without diluting it. You can do the same with leftover tea.
- (46) If there's a splash or two of wine left in the bottle, use it to de-glaze pans to add flavor to whatever you're cooking.
- (47) If you have pickle juice left in a jar, don't pour it down the drain. Use it to make a fresh batch of refrigerator pickles, or add it to salad dressings (or dirty martinis).
- (48) You can also freeze broth or stock in ice cube trays, and use a cube or two whenever you make a pan sauce or gravy.
- (49) If there's just a bit of honey left in the bottom of the jar, add a squeeze or two of lemon juice and swish it around. The lemon juice will loosen up the honey, and you have the perfect addition to a cup of tea.

### **Finally...**

- (50) If you can't think of any way to use that food in the kitchen, compost it. Everything except for meat and dairy will work in a compost pile, and at least your extra food can be used for something useful. Such as growing more food!