

HOW TO REDUCE WASTE in the kitchen

by J. NEGRIN

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LIST: HOW TO REDUCE WASTE IN THE KITCHEN

Dedicated to today's youth. This list is just a start - they're so inventive, I'm sure they'll come up with all kinds of creative ideas.

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The statistics on food waste and other excess in the kitchen are staggering and can cost home kitchen budgets thousands of dollars each year. Donating extra ingredients or food to community kitchens can help out those in our community struggling with food insecurity.

Remember: Check Food Safety Rules to ensure that proper protocol is being followed when passing on food.

// Label grocery foods with notes to remember to eat them by a certain date. Keep an eye on which foods to rotate to the front of the fridge or pantry. Date your leftover and take-out in the fridge so that you know when it's time to use up.

// One the fridge, post a LIST OF THIS WEEK'S LEFTOVERS and READY-TO-COOK-AND-EAT Vegetables and fruits that need to be used so that the household knows what's available.

// learn how to pick out produce so that it's right ripeness for your dinners or events, which cuts down on throwing out overly ripe avocados or unripe melons before a BBQ. If you need cantaloupe and honeydew for the weeke and it's Wednesday, ask the produce people how to ensure it will be the right amount of ripeness, and same goes for other produce.

// Make your fridge super organized with fridge or old office containers that are labeled with "use by" notes or sticks, or on the food or tupperware especially if there are roommates or multiple cooks in the house - that you can pull out each container, keep inventory, and use them by the right date. Containers for vegetables, fruit, root vegetables, leafy greens, fresh herbs can be stored in various containers so that it's less likely to go missing in the back or lost in a drawer and then tossed out.

// When buying produce or other products that go bad quickly. Have a plan to cook all of it on grocery day, or the day after rather than having no plan at all. Cooked produce often lasts a little longer than raw and we're more likely eat it.

// Create a Weekly Buffet-Use-Up-Fridge Dinner and place everything into little bowls to customize a grain bowl or make a snack platter for dinner - sometimes kids enjoy eating finger foods and arranging their required foods like vegetables into different designs with a plate with dips.

// Do a Once-a-Week Fridge Dump, and throw any leftover vegetables into a large stockpot and create a soup, chowder, stew - or use a slow cooker to make dinner for a couple fo nights.

// Hold a 'most creative' Once-a-Month Pantry Meal Contest and make sure that the almost expired foods, used or donated.

// Use leftover chicken for tacos, chicken salad with may or chicken tortilla soup, making sure to utilize it within the safe amount of time per Food Safety Rules.

// Invite experienced cooks over to help prepare Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) box vegetables that you're unfamiliar with, and keep looking for unique ways to cook your favorite vegetables, and checking out cuisines all over the world. .

// Find creative ways to use up old produce such as vacuum seal them / ziplock it - and freeze for later.

// Use vegetable bits that you'd normally compost or toss to make vegetable broth or some kind of clear soup that's strained.

// Store fresh herbs in a jar of water like you would flowers, and wrap with bag or leave out so that they last longer.

// Freeze leftovers right away with dates so it doesn't expire in the fridge and keep the freezer organized so you can find leftover meals.

// Bring leftovers to work and share with colleagues or give it to a neighbor if you're someone that often doesn't use leftovers or forgets what's in the freezer.

// Freeze food in ready-go-portions - both raw ingredients like fruit in 4 ounce jars for your morning smoothies or leftover soup in wide mouth 8 ounce jars.

// Go through the pantry every few months and donate packaged food that hasn't been used - and not expired - to a local food bank.

// Plan your meals carefully so that you don't find random protein or produce in the bottom of a drawer after it's gone bad. Planning carefully leads to healthier meals and saving money too.

// Make lots of one-pot meals with leftover ingredients. For example, stale tortilla chips for chicken tortilla soup or wilted vegetables in chili. There are lots of ways to maximize all of the ingredients in the fridge and pantry and still love your delicious meal!

// Compost! Either build one at home, find a drop-off center or community garden who takes home composting deliveries. Be sure to check the rules carefully because they differ as to what they'll take or don't take. Buy the garden composting bags that break down to store your scraps in. In some places like in the PNW, you're able to throw compost right in the yard bin.

// Share produce with an elderly or disabled neighbor which is such a lovely thing to do - and cuts down on waste - and creates connection within communities.

// Share meals with others - we're humans who are used to sharing food around a campfire. It's natural for us to want to break bread with others. And if we're too busy for that, dropping off extra apples that come in a large "on sale" bag from the store to the neighbor who makes applesauce since she only has dentures, may lead to some feel good vibes!

// Use over-ripe fruit for compote or rustic baked desserts like apple crisps and muffins.

// Freeze peeled brown bananas and use in smoothies, banana ice cream, banana bread or other baked items in lieu of a sweetener.

// Use carrots, cucumbers or radishes for pickling which isn't hard to do at home. Use up fresh herbs by adding to pickling jars.

// Extra fresh herbs can also be made into pestos, chimichurri, herb oils, tartar sauce, or soups. Once they're in a sauce or oil, they can be frozen into small ice cubes or regular size, then transferred to a container or bag.

// Wilted vegetables can also be used for soup or stews, soft fruit for crisps and so on. There are a lot of great recipes that people have made since the beginning of time that uses every bit of food that was purchased! Even stems can be added to soups, finely chopped or cooked in a stir fry.

// Find creative ways to utilize your herb purées or pestos: in grain bowls, pasta, sandwich spread or combine with yogurt, cottage cheese, feta or cream cheese for an herb dip or spread.

// If you have extra beans, they can be used for chili, mashed for huevos rancheros or sandwich spreads, bean dips, veggie burgers or used in delicious dishes that are served in different cuisines all over the world.

// Use rags instead of paper towels as much as possible. I don't use paper towels much but when I need to store fresh herbs so they last or wipe the floor, I'll use a small piece.

// Recycle plastic containers, jars, cans, plastic bags, boxes, newspapers, even foil - be sure to read your city / county rules regarding what can be placed in the recycling. Remember to clean them off, and be careful with sharp edges from cans, etc.

// Save nice looking jars or other containers to give away to neighbors or friends with leftover meals.

// Donate jars and cans to art classes or art schools for youth or retirement homes that hold craft classes.

// Wash containers out and re-use them for storing foods or giving away leftovers.

// Use leftover containers as planters / art projects (cans), or drinking glasses (jars).

// If you have a creative or scientific background, perhaps help students figure out ways to convert these items or garbage that can't be recycled into re-usable products which is being done by many non-profits around the world.

// Wash plastic bags, especially ziplock bags, turn them inside out and let them dry for re-use.

// If foil is barely used, flatten it out and store it for another use, as many times as possible - make sure it's recycled if that's possible in your city or county.

// Use as little water as possible while cooking and washing dishes - wash dishes in a tub with a little water and soap them well, then rinse with small amounts of water.

// Try not to run the water in the sink when you're not using it.

// Wipe dishes with soapy water while the water isn't running and then rinse them off quickly.

// Steam vegetables instead of blanching to save water.

// If you can afford it, purchase recycled paper towels, compostable gloves and compostable cutlery, and other upcycled kitchen supplies.

// Use silpats instead of parchment paper or foil - or grease pans like the old days.

// // The unbruised part of ripe avocados could be scooped out and turned into guacamole or blended with beans into a dip.

// Use leftover nuts or seeds from a gathering and turn them into a creamy nut butter, or a dairy-free sauce, or trail mix for a hike.

// Use stems, peels and usually discarded pieces of vegetables for vegetable, beef or chicken stock.

// Chop mushroom stems and use them for stock or vegetable saute.

// Turn leftover fish or chicken into burgers or patties.

// Empty the freezer every few months and use up the frozen fruit in smoothies or desserts and veggies in a soup or chili.

// Save rice from take-out or restaurant leftovers and make fried rice, pilaf, or add it to tomato soup, avgolemono, or other soup.

// Marinate leftover quinoa or rice in your favorite dressing so it doesn't dry out and add ingredients to turn it into a grain bowl for lunch.

// Turn leftover rice into rice pudding or other desserts with coconut milk.

// Utilize the side dishes and accoutrements that come with food delivery or your restaurant meal, and use them for a sandwich or lunch the next day.

// Save soy sauce packets or condiment packets for camping trips or give them to a college kid to use in a dorm room.

// Turn old wraps or tortillas into pinwheel appetizers or sandwiches for lunch.

// Add leftover squeezed citrus slices to your drinking water for flavor and nutrients - any kind, lemon, orange or lime, preferably organic.

// Save seeds from butternut, pumpkin, delicata squash or other squash - clean and dry them, toss with olive oil and salt and bake for a few minutes until crispy.

// Use squash shells for boats, stews or other creative "containers" to serve your meals.

// If you have extra garden vegetables like zucchini or yellow squash, or herbs, turn them into bread, muffins or soups and give them as gifts with little wrappings and notes. Sell them for a school fundraiser or charity.

// Turn sauces that aren't being used in the fridge into dips that are served to kids in little bowls with sliced vegetables or pita chips.

// Grate vegetables nobody is eating and turn them into fritters or pan-fried patties with some egg and bread crumbs.

// Onions that are found at the bottom of the fridge drawer can be turned into caramelized onions for French Onion Soup or served over steak, or in an omelet.

// If you have too much garlic, you can roast it whole in the oven with olive oil and use it in sauces, dips, or soups. You can also simmer it in some olive oil and create garlic butter that stores in the fridge and added to stir-fry or other dishes.

// Slice wilting red pepper or zucchini into cute dipper shapes and serve with ranch dressing or other dips to young eaters.

// Roast leftover bell peppers, remove skin and seeds, and serve on sandwiches, with eggs or blend into a sauce or dip.

// Extra fish can be used for tacos, grain bowls, pasta, breakfast hash, or other dishes.

// Turn leftover fish into mousse by blending it with cream cheese or crème fraîche, and serve as a dip or sandwich spread for lunches.

// If you have a huge bunch of dark leafy greens, they can be wilted into salad or side dish with just a little garlic and soy sauce, or they can be used in Bean (and Kale) Soup, used for a large Caesar Salad or added to a frittata.

// Extra vegetables like zucchini wilting in the fridge can be sliced, roasted and sprinkled with grated Parmesan for a popular side dish.

// Potatoes and sweet potatoes that nobody is eating can be sliced into french fries or wedges that are baked in the oven, or grated for hash browns.

// Leftover rice and fish can be turned into a sushi bake casserole dish with sliced avocado, sesame seeds, spicy mayo, wasabi, and sliced seaweed snacks.

// If you have a spiralizer, or a peeler, you can create zucchini noodles or other vegetables can be turned into veggie gluten-free "noodles" and served with your favorite sauce.

// Get creative when you have random ingredients like combining orange juice with sliced fennel, or add ginger and soy sauce to leftover veggies.

// Use fennel fronds like chopped fresh herbs, or beet greens like you would kale (they're super nutritious), use carrot greens for an herb purée with basil.

// Use leftover rice with a simple poached egg dinner, and add toasted sesame oil or other flavorful condiments and seasonings to the rice.

// Dry your own herbs and store them in a tightly sealed jar or leftover spice jar.

// Save old spice jars for garage items like nails or art supplies.

// Utilize wilting tomatoes and other vegetables to create a puff pastry tart with them.

// Turn wrinkly tomatoes into blistered tomatoes, a sauce or add them to a sheet pan meal.

// Place your root vegetables and potatoes in one section of the fridge since they last awhile and keep the salad greens and other delicate vegetables in front where they're more likely to be cooked off.

// Cut vegetables like celery and carrots and leave them in a bowl on the lowest shelf for after school snacks.

// As soon as fruit is brought home from the store, slice it and leave it in containers for easy snack grabs and ready-to-go lunch boxes.

// Freeze leftover soup, stew, slow cooker and chili in 4 ounce or 8 ounce jars - the wide mouth ones - with EXTRA ROOM since liquid expands when it's frozen. Date them and use them for last minute meals or pre-dinner snack when everyone is hungry.

// When you have random ingredients out like sliced grapefruit for breakfast, or chopped herbs - find a way to create a dressing or sauce with them since they're ready to go.

// If there's random vegetables, halved, cubed in a container or leftover from another meal, turn them into a Bean & Veggie Stir-Fry using pantry items.

// Try to use the jarred items on the door of the fridge such as olives, pickles, capers, sun-dried tomatoes, nut butters, and condiments often so that they get used up.

// Make sure oil doesn't go rancid and utilize what's in the fridge to make salad dressings or marinades for grilled meat proteins or tofu / tempeh. Keep a close eye on delicate cold-pressed or flavored oils like flax oil since they rancid more quickly than other oils.

// Leftover fruit can be frozen into granita.

// If there's spinach water or cucumber water that's drained from a recipe, use it in juices or smoothies - or drink plain for extra nutrients.

// Grill leftover pineapple rings or softening peaches and nectarines. Heat bananas with some chocolate in foil and top with chopped nuts and vegan vanilla ice cream.

// If you have some stale bread and other random ingredients, make a breakfast strata or French toast casserole.

// Leftover ingredients like canned corn or random vegetables can be turned into a breaded casserole and baked in the oven for dinner the next night.

// When roasting vegetables off for the week, keep them plain so they can be used in tacos with spicy seasoning one night and over a grain bowl with peanut sauce another night - keeping them bland makes it more likely they'll get used up.

// Add leftover vegetables to pizza or quesadillas - both favorite foods that are likely to ensure that the veggies are eaten.

// Save the bottom of asparagus or other vegetable bits that are normally tossed out for flavoring soups or risotto.

// If you don't have a lot of time to cook and often throwing away meat in the fridge, marinate it the night before so that it's ready to go on the grill or in the oven right when you get home or cook in a slow cooker all day.

// If some vegetables have bruising, or wilting leaves, remove those and throw the still edible pieces into your stir fry.

// Use leftover fruit for mocktails and creative healthy juice drinks.

// Extra leafy greens can be turned into chips like Kale Chips - just dried, tear, toss with olive oil, season with your favorite blends and bake.

// Add some sort of balsamic or soy glaze to vegetables that nobody is eating, and bake in the oven or grill until tender - sometimes picky eaters prefer their veggies raw, others like them cooked plain or with their favorite sauce.

// Place a side dish of vegetables or crudités with a favorite dip on the table every single night, even when ordering take-out or pizza, with some ranch dip or hummus - whatever will get people to eat them.

// Grill fruit nobody is eating with a little maple syrup, or caramelize apples or other fruit on the stove if it's wilting on the counter and serve over yogurt, use in a toaster pastry or galette.

// Experiment with different cooked vegetable dishes like chutney and other cooked fruit sauces, glazes or recipes.

// Use fruit for parfaits, trifles, pudding or other dessert dishes.

// Slice wilting vegetables into rounds and turn into "chips" in the air fryer or the oven after tossing with olive oil and salt.

// If you have access to a dehydrator, use wilting fruit or veggies to create savory or sweet snacks.

// If money is tight and there aren't a lot of options, use beans from the pantry and salad dressing left in the fridge to create a bean salad with whatever pantry items (artichokes, raisins, sun-dried tomatoes, corn, other canned and jarred items) are available. Eat it raw for one meal and then cook it into a stir-fry the next night.

// Store pesto in little ziplocks if freezer space is tight, spice jars, ice cube trays and use on everything, eggs, grains, or pasta.

// Leftover bagels often don't keep long in the freezer, so slice them into bagel chips on the diagonal and toss with olive and salt, bake until crispy and golden brown.

// Pitas, whole wheat tortillas, corn tortillas can all be turned into chips by brushing with oil, and adding salt, seasonings and garlic and can be served with dips as a snack instead of being tossed out.

// Old apples can be turned into apple butter and leftover bits of fruit can be mashed into butter and served on toast or pancakes for weekend guests.

// Have too many avocados? Make guacamole and cover it with saran wrap and - right on top so it doesn't turn brown - and store it in the fridge for a few nights to use on burgers, in sandwiches, as dip or with tacos. Use on avocado toast every morning with fried eggs.

// Turn leftover polenta or grits into pizza crust or patties that can be used instead of bread for eggs in the morning or dinner pizza. Leftover risotto from a restaurant can be turned into mini risotto cakes for lunchboxes.

// Use that little bit of sauce leftover from another dinner to poach eggs and turn into shakshuka, or cook it with chicken or other proteins to flavor them.

// Use leftover take-out containers to give away leftovers or send in lunchboxes.

// Leftover crackers, nuts or seeds can be blended in a food processor and turned into crumbs - then used as crusts.

// Create your own cream cheese spread or dip by adding that last bit of fresh herbs like dill and chives, garlic and some lemon zest sitting on the counter or wilting in the fridge.

// After hosting a BBQ, use the vegetables meant for the hamburger toppings as a salad and add your favorite dressing.

// Find as many ways to utilize your favorite vegetables and fruit that are always in the house, with creative input from everyone in the house.

// If you have some egg wash leftover after baking, scramble it into a mini meal.

// Use leftover mashed potatoes in tacos or even in sandwiches, burrito bowls or burger casserole.

// Make a pasta primavera with leftover random veggies, adding in some grated Parmesan and items from the jars on the fridge door like olives, sun-dried tomatoes, and peperoncino.

// Use leftovers to make a Tapas bar and come up with creative combinations made with random ingredients.

// Add vegetables like leafy greens to frittatas and purées.

// Juice fruit that nobody is eating and use it in a dressing or sauce.

// Pan-fry wilting tomatoes in some olive oil with salt and Italian seasonings for sandwiches or eggs.

// Turn fruit into applesauce type texture and use with yogurt, feeding babies, or instead of sweeteners in baked goods like I add applesauce or mashed bananas to breads and muffins. You can freeze the extra in small containers, remember to date it.

// Wilting apples can be made into apple chips.

// Grapes and blueberries that nobody is eating can be frozen which kids find a delicious snack.

// Berries can be turned into on-the-go smoothies, in green salads, for fruit salad, compote, berry pink dressings and pasta sauce.

// Extra juice nobody is drinking can be turned into a reduction like my pomegranate reduction over baked dessert. It can also be used as a marinade like when I used mango juice over the coconut and macadamia nut crusted grilled fish.

// Use leftover tortillas for quesadillas, enchiladas, migas, tostadas, chilaquitas, taquitos, and your own unique casseroles.

// Leftover beans, tempeh or ground beef can be turned into meatballs or koftas.

// Break apart pantry items like ramen noodles and use them in different ways or use a seasoning packet for something you wouldn't normally do like ranch dip seasoning packet over tofu fries, utilizing whatever's available in the most interesting combination.

// Random vegetables always taste delicious when cooked in coconut milk with a little curry or your favorite seasoning blend. Find as many of those sauces that you love, and use them to cook available vegetables even if it's frozen veggies if chopping them sounds daunting and you don't have much time. Knife skill lessons help make cooking vegetables a lot easier.

// Peanut sauce is often appealing to many eaters so it can be served with any vegetables that are being ignored.

// Extra head of cauliflower? Roasted and puréed cauliflower can be used in soups to create a dairy-free creamy consistency. It can also be turned into cauliflower rice if you have a food process with the grater attachment or a box grater and some time. Cauliflower rice can be frozen and used for various dishes.

// Any leftover vegetables can be cut into pieces like they are in frozen food bags, and then placed in a very sealed ziptop bag in the freezer - don't forget to date it. I'd remove as much air as possible to cut down on freezer burn.

// Turn neglected vegetables into finger food and fun appetizers on a toothpick.

// Cook items like avocados into different dishes like my avocado "fries" - get creative with leftover vegetables from work or someone's house.

// Leftover salsa from take-out containers or the juice at the bottom of a container can be used to marinate steak or used in a dip or added to a tomato pasta sauce for kick and flavor.

// Extra dates, figs, raisins and other random snack platter items can be used for chocolate or yogurt bark, which can stay in the freezer for last minute guests.

// Random canned veggies and beans can be turned into savory scones which costs very little to make.

// Get creative with flour to make savory and healthy rustic baked goods.

// Oats can be turned into so many dishes like granola, overnight oats, muffins, breads and all kinds of filling dishes while times are lean.

// Extra potatoes can become soup, gnocchi, or a side dish, and so many dishes including baked potatoes with a little buffet of little bowls with whatever toppings are available, beans, cheese, scallions, etc.

// Use leftover tzatziki and other random dips and sauces over cooked potatoes or as a sandwich spread.

// Leftover quinoa, rice or other grains can be turned into patties that are seasoned and pan-fried with added finely diced veggies.

// Store foods correctly so they don't go bad - keep nuts in the fridge or freezer so they last longer.

IDEAS ON HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF LEFTOVERS FROM HOLIDAY GATHERINGS (this is from an earlier post):

NOTE: Please remember to be careful with dishes that contain chicken, meat, shell fish, mayonnaise and other ingredients that are higher risk foods and need to be kept at the correct temperature(s) while serving otherwise, they need to be tossed out.

// There's also a lot of ways to re-purpose the random ingredients left after a holiday weekend or event such as giving them to neighbors who have large households is one way.

// Turn the ingredients into casseroles and drop them off at home-bound folks who may have been left on their own for the holiday.

// Use coleslaw from yesterday's barbecue in fish tacos the next day or on top of a sandwich with deli meat for lunch.

// Slice corn off the cob carefully and turn into corn salad or roasted corn dip.

// Potato salad that hasn't been out in the sun all day long could be combined with other ingredients in a sandwich wrap for lunch.

// Macaroni salad or other pasta dishes can be turned into a comforting casserole and baked with bread crumbs.

// Fruit platters can be turned into fruit salads, with some toasted nuts that could be served for breakfast or used in school lunches.

// Baked beans can be used for a burrito bar or taco bowls for dinner the next day with leftover guacamole or salsa.

// If there's leftover cheese, it can be frozen and used later for pizza or pasta.

// Crackers can be blended into breadcrumbs or placed in a ziptop bag and crushed with a rolling pin (if a student didn't have a rolling pin at home, I'd suggest using a kids car toy with wheels to create crumbs).

// Leftover bread can be turned into breadcrumbs, croutons, French toast, or grilled sandwiches.

// Hamburger and hotdog buns could be turned into garlic bread with roasted garlic olive oil or used for other sandwiches or grilled cheese. Hot dog buns

// Dips could be turned into stuffed mushroom fillings or sandwich spreads to take for lunch for the week.

// Potato chip crumbs at the bottom of the bag could be used as coating for pan-fried chicken or tofu.

// Leftover burger veggies or crudite can be cubed for a grain bowl, or cooked into a sauce, or placed on skewers for the BBQ.

// Vegetables can also be chopped and turned into green salad with a favorite dressing.

// Potatoes can be grilled and turned into a casserole or hash browns to eat with breakfast the next day.

// Cornbread can be used for croutons, or in a layered casserole like my black bean nacho dip dish or tamale pie.

// Leftover salads or vegetables could be placed into stuffed cabbage or bell peppers.

// Watermelon and other fruit can be turned into watermelon feta salad, juiced, or frozen in chunks to use in granita.

