



FRUGAL FOODIE

Practical Uses for Aging Produce

by Judith Fertig

When Jacques Pépin was growing up in France during World War II, he watched his mother use every scrap of food to meet the family's needs, and then send him to live with a farmer in summer so her growing son could eat fresh from the farm. Today, the internationally renowned PBS-TV chef and cookbook author carries these sensibilities forward at his home and studio in Madison, Connecticut.

"In Europe, and certainly in France, healthy food is much more expensive," he says. "In America, a chef may have the person that washes dishes also prepare salads. With lettuce, he'll cut off the whole top, cut out the heart and throw out the rest."

U.S. restaurant kitchens mirror home kitchens, where the average family throws away a quarter of the food they buy, wasting an average of \$2,200 a year. These scraps mean wasted food and money at home, plus misspent resources to grow and transport the food. According to a report by the National Resource Defense Council, "Getting food to our tables eats up 10 percent of the total U.S. energy budget, uses 50 percent

of U.S. land and swallows 80 percent of the fresh water consumed in the United States."

To save money and also live better, here are just some of many easy ways to use up every bit of fresh produce we buy.

Asparagus Ends

Self-described "frugal foodie" Diana Johnson, of Auburn, Washington, never lets asparagus ends go to waste. With the help of a blender, she turns them into a creamy asparagus soup—minus the cream—that her family loves (Tinyurl.com/AsparagusSoupTips).

Broccoli, Swiss Chard and Spinach Stems

Thrifty cooks know the magic of quick pickles. Recycle the brine from pickles and pack thinly cut stems of broccoli, Swiss chard and mature spinach into the jar until covered with the brine, then seal and refrigerate. In a few days, these quick pickles will be ready for snacking and sandwiches.

Carrot and Beet Tops

Very fine carrot tops can be used like parsley.

With a food processor or high-speed blender, transform them into a favorite pesto or salsa verde recipe, suggests Registered Dietitian and nutritionist Madeline Basler, of Long Island, New York. One of her go-to's is her Earth Day Carrot Top Pesto (Tinyurl.com/CarrotTopPestoRecipe). Beet greens can be sautéed like spinach, in a little extra-virgin olive oil with garlic, as a veggie side.

Fruit Snippets

Stray grapes, a half-finished peach, overripe bananas, wrinkly berries and the core of a pineapple can all go in the freezer, and then into a smoothie.

Leftover Wine

Freeze what's left in the bottle in ice cube trays, suggests Anisha Jhaveri, a film writer and wine lover in New York City. It can add flavor to soups and stews, sauces and desserts like wine-poached pears.

Lemon Peels

The limonene in lemon peels is a natural cleaner and degreaser, says blogger Jill Nystul, of Salt Lake City, Utah. She makes her own Citrus Vinegar All-Purpose Cleanser by simply packing lemon peels in a jar and topping with vinegar. See how at Tinyurl.com/HomemadeCitrusCleaners.

Vegetable Peels and Trimmings

Instead of throwing out onion skins, carrot peels, celery leaves and tough leek stems, collect them in a freezer bag over time and store in the freezer. When enough has accumulated to fill a pot, make homemade vegetable stock, suggests Sonnet Lauberth, a certified holistic health coach, blogger and cookbook author in Seattle (InSonnetsKitchen.com/how-to-make-perfect-vegetable-stock-for).

At home, Pépin makes "fridge soup" once a week. "Whatever is left in the fridge—carrots, lettuce, a piece of leftover meat or whatever else I made the other day—goes into the soup," says Pépin. "We finish it with some vermicelli or polenta or good bread." A delicious meal, shared with family and friends, makes frugality festive.

Judith Fertig writes award-winning cookbooks plus foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).

Nine Tips to Tackle Food Waste at Home

Jonathan Bloom, author of *American Wasteland: How America Throws Away Nearly Half of Its Food (And What We Can Do About It)*, suggests many ways to curb this habit at WastedFood.com.

Here are some suggestions from him and others:

1 Shop smart. Plan meals for the week with a detailed shopping list, suggests Madeline Basler, a certified dietitian nutritionist in Long Island, New York.

2 Save, transform and eat leftovers. “Eat down the fridge,” counsels Kim O’Donnell, a chef and cookbook author in Portland, Oregon. Turn leftovers into frittata, sandwich fillings, pasta sauces and soups. In this way, we’re not eating quite the same meal again.

3 Store food in safe, sealable glass containers, so it’s easy to see.



4 Avoid clutter in the refrigerator and freezer; if we can’t see it, we won’t eat it.

5 Treat expiration and sell-by dates as just guidelines. There is wiggle room in both, advises Bloom.

6 Donate extra pantry items to food banks and places that provide hot meals for those in need.

7 Preserve the bounty of the garden. Learn how to make quick pickles, pasta sauces and foods to freeze.

8 Join a food exchange. Emily Paster, co-founder of Chicago Food Swap, helps farmers, foragers, home cooks, gardeners, bakers and canners trade or barter their produce and products.

9 Go social. PDX Food Swap, in Portland, Oregon; BK Swappers, in Brooklyn, New York; and ATX Swappers, in Austin, Texas, combine food exchange events with a potluck.