



# WATER-WISE KITCHEN

## A Few Small Steps Can Make the Difference

by Avery Mack

**T**he United Nations warns that water use is outpacing population growth two to one. At this rate, two-thirds of the world will face water stress by 2025, meaning fewer crops and jobs and higher food prices.

“Globally, 3 million people, mostly children, die each year due to water-related issues,” says Sister Dorothy Maxwell, of the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt, in New York. “Water is a precious commodity. Every drop in supply should increase awareness.”

### Smarter Shopping

For significant savings, use ingredients with a lower water footprint. “Be conscientious about food purchases,” advises Gene Baur, president and co-founder of the nonprofit Farm Sanctuary, in Watkins Glen, New York, and Orland and Los Angeles, California.

“Choosing plant foods instead of animal products can make a huge difference. Estimates show that one person switching to a vegan diet can save at least 1,000 gallons of water every day.”

Before landing on a plate, an eight-ounce steak will have necessitated 850 gallons of water, including growing and processing the animal’s food grain. The amount of water needed to produce a quarter-pound hamburger equals that of 30 average showers.

“Dietary choices have environmental and ethical impacts,” agrees Michael Schwarz, founder of Hudson Valley Treeline Cheese, in Kingston, New York. “The carbon and water footprints of conventional dairy products are also enormous.” His company’s vegan cheeses are basically cashews, probiotic cultures and salt. Unlike American’s 10 million dairy cows, cashews aren’t injected with growth hormones, don’t emit methane and produce no waste runoff to pollute waterways.

### Smarter Storage

The Natural Resources Defense Council reports that Americans annually discard more than 35 million tons of uneaten food that costs local governments \$1.5 billion annually in clean up

and landfill maintenance. Food waste contributes to climate change through the use of huge quantities of water, fertilizer, land and fuel to process, refrigerate and transport it. Plus, it emits methane gas as it decomposes. Reducing food waste can have a far-reaching impact.

Applying simple household tips will help minimize waste: Protect all meat, poultry and fish along with dairy products like yogurt, sour cream and cottage cheese from bacteria by storing them in the original packaging until used; seal any leftovers in airtight containers. Wrap hard cheese in foil or waxed paper after opening. Keep fruits and vegetables separate and don't wash before refrigerating to forestall mold. Activated oxygen, like that used in the small refrigerator appliance BerryBreeze, neutralizes bacteria and mold to keep stored foods fresh longer.

## Smarter Cooking

Maxwell's guidance for savvy water use includes: Don't pre-rinse dishes. Run the dishwasher only when full. Use less soap when washing up and make sure it's biodegradable. Water-wise experts also offer these cooking tips.

Use a single pot of water to blanch several kinds of vegetables before freezing. Start with the lightest color and

end with the darkest, especially odorous veggies like asparagus or Brussels sprouts. "Unless it's greasy, cooking and drinking water can be reused to nourish plants," explains Diane MacEachern, founder and publisher of *BigGreenPurse.com*. "I cool egg and veggie cooking water to pour on herbs and flowers."

As whole potatoes simmer, set a steamer basket over them to cook other veggies and conserve water. Fewer pots mean less dishwashing, and leftover potato water adds extra flavor to homemade potato dinner rolls.

Cook shorter shapes of dry pasta in less water, first placing them in cold water and lowering the heat to a simmer once it hits a boil, also saving energy (*Tinyurl.com/ColdWaterPastaMethod*).

Directions for hard-boiled eggs call for enough cold water to cover before boiling, followed by the mandatory icewater bath, using goodly amounts of water and energy. Steam eggs instead; find instructions at *Tinyurl.com/BestHardCookedEggs*. For a large quantity of eggs, try baking them (*AltonBrown.com/baked-eggs*).

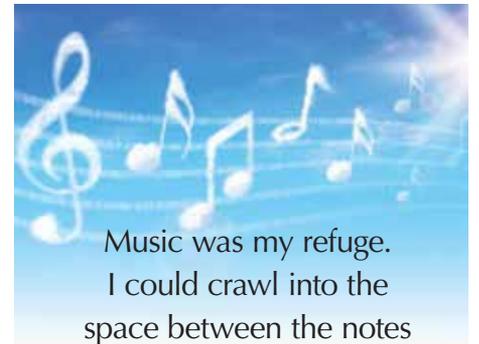
Freezer jam contains more fruit, much less sugar and needs no water bath for canning jars; recipes are available online. Eat watermelon as is or in salads, compost the peel and pickle the rind using only one cup of water

with minimal boiling time (*Tinyurl.com/WatermelonRindPickling*).

Rather than waste warm water to defrost frozen foods, simply move them overnight to the refrigerator. Composting is far more eco-wise than running a garbage disposal and sink water.

More than 70 percent of Earth's surface is covered in water, but only .007 percent—like a single drop in a five-gallon bucket—is usable for hydrating its 6.8 billion people and all plants and animals. We must be creative to protect that drop by kicking it up a notch in the kitchen.

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Music was my refuge.  
I could crawl into the  
space between the notes  
and curl my back  
to loneliness.

— MAYA ANGELOU