



# Extension News Column

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**Re:** Pinching Pennies column

Americans are the champs again — at wasting food. We throw out 27 percent of edible food and the average family of four wastes out about \$800-worth of groceries in a year. According to Jonathan Bloom, author of *American Wasteland* on CNN, we waste enough food in a day to fill up the Rose Bowl. Most of that food can be saved by planning or by simply using up what you have purchased.

Plan ahead. Planning what foods you are going to be cooking is key to having everything ready when you need it — no need for that quick trip to the grocery store for that missing ingredient. When I shop for groceries, I sit down, plan seven meals, check my pantry for needed ingredients, and then purchase what is needed. But it is easy to be tempted and purchase extra items in the store. Remember to be realistic about what you have time to prepare given your schedule each week.

Most of the waste comes in our kitchens from unused leftovers and uncooked or unserved items. Let's take a quick look at what we can do with some of the commonly tossed items in your kitchen.

**Stale bread** can become breadcrumbs, French toast or parmesan croutons. Let the bread dry out, or toast it in the oven at 350° for 5 to 10 minutes or until golden brown. Process in a food processor or crumble up for breadcrumbs. For French toast, take bread that is over the hill and dip in an egg batter and fry. Or, brush with butter, sprinkle on the parmesan cheese, cut into cubes and toast.

**Vegetables** can be used in soups, stews or frittatas. Add leftover vegetables to soups or stews. In fact, I keep a small bag in my freezer that I put those last few beans, corn or carrots in. Then when I want to make soup or stew, there are a variety of vegetables that are cooked and ready to add. Sauté small amounts of different kinds of unused veggies and mix with eggs, cheese and herbs to make frittatas.

Mashed potatoes can be used to make potato pancakes. Mix the leftover potatoes with an egg, a small amount of flour and fry them in a little hot oil. This is one of my family's all time favorite side dishes — and they never think of them as leftovers.

Leftover **fruit** can be added to smoothies. Freeze overripe fruits for future smoothies or popsicles. Those brown bananas can be thrown in the freezer without

even peeling. When you are ready to use them, peel the brown skin and use the soft pulp.

**Extra rice** can be mixed with salsa and heated for Mexican rice, seasoned with soy sauce mixed with other vegetables and heated in a little hot oil for fried rice, or added to soup. If you have a sweet tooth, fold rice into your favorite pudding.

We all know that the freezer is a great place to store small amounts of meat and vegetables to be used in soups. But think beyond the common items. Freeze leftover waffles, pancakes or French toast. When you are short of time, pop them in the microwave or in a toaster and you'll have a fresh breakfast at a small cost. Save leftover chopped peppers and onions by freezing. They'll be ready to go the next time you need them — and they are already chopped and ready to go. Freeze leftover coffee or tea in ice cube trays. It's a great way to have iced coffee or tea without diluting the flavor.

Now as we think about using all those leftovers in the refrigerator, we need to rethink our attitudes. I prefer to think of them as planned overs, not leftovers. I plan to make extra, so I can reuse them in new dishes. So, if you quit calling them leftovers, your family won't groan when you bring them out for a second showing.

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