



ReFresh Nebraska

Stop the Rot

Summer 2020

COVID-19 and Reducing Food Waste in the Home

As with most aspects of our daily lives the Coronavirus has profoundly affected our food supply, both in terms of what we eat, where we eat it, and that which goes to waste. In March, quarantines forced restaurants to shutter dining rooms, leaving large amounts of perishables to rot. Then in April it was the farmer's turn, tilling under untold tons of produce as broken supply chains left them with nowhere to sell their goods. Beef, pork and chicken processing plants became COVID hot spots, reducing production well into May. And through it all, food insecurity skyrocketed as millions lost their jobs to quarantine, and supply issues were addressed further up the chain.

While restaurants unfortunately continue to struggle in many places, most supply chain issues have been worked out over time, at least in terms of foodstuff making it to grocery store and food pantry shelves. In fact, organizations and individuals across the country have stepped up in a myriad of creative and innovative ways to ensure that their fellow Americans keep food on the table during this unprecedented crisis.

One such group is FarmLink, a grassroots movement "that connects farms with food banks to feed thousands in need while supporting essential jobs." Dismayed by the amount of produce left to rot in their home state of California, two friends quarantined from college called area farmers to see if there was surplus they'd be willing to donate.

Within a matter of days, the pair had transported some 10,000 eggs and 50,000 onions to the food bank they had volunteered at while in high school. Encouraged by the early success, they started contacting friends across the country to do the same, and to date have matched more than 3 million lbs of food between farmers and food banks in 30 states!

While such inspirational efforts help reduce food waste further up the supply chain, issues in the average American home likely remain. That said, many in the food industry have theorized that the current crisis will encourage folks to reduce the food they waste. With that in mind, this is a perfect time to review best practices in the home.

Food Waste Reduction Strategies:
SMART SHOPPING: Shop with Meals in Mind

- Shop your kitchen first and note items you already have.
 - Buy What You Need – Make a shopping list based on remaining needs for meals you'll eat at home before your next shopping trip.
 - Next to fresh items on the list, note the quantity you need or number of meals you're buying for.
- SMART STORAGE:** Keep Fruits and Vegetables Fresh
- Store produce for maximum freshness - know which belong inside and outside the fridge. They will taste better and last longer.
- Inside the fridge:**
- Apples, berries, and cherries
 - Grapes, kiwi, lemons, and oranges

- Melons, nectarines, apricots, peaches, and plums (after ripening)
- Avocados, pears, tomatoes (after ripening)

• Almost all vegetables and herbs
Outside the fridge:

- Bananas, mangos, papayas, and pineapples: (in a cool place)
- Potatoes, onions: (in a cool, dark place)

• Basil and winter squashes: (once cut, store squashes in fridge)

Other storage tips:

- If you like your fruit at room temperature, take only a day's worth out at a time.
- Many fruits give off natural gases that hasten the spoilage of other produce. Store bananas, apples, and tomatoes by themselves and store fruits and vegetables in different bins.
- Consider storage bags and containers designed to help extend the life of your produce.
- To prevent mold, wash berries just before eating.

SMART PREP: Prep now, eat later

- When you get home from the store, take the time to wash, dry, chop, dice, slice, and place your fresh food items in clear storage containers for snacks and easy cooking.
- Befriend your freezer and visit it often. Freeze food such as bread, sliced fruit, or meat that you know you won't be able to eat in time.
- Cut your time in the kitchen by preparing and freezing meals ahead of time.
- Prepare and cook perishable items, then freeze them for use throughout the month.

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For example, bake and freeze chicken breasts or fry and freeze taco meat.

SMART SAVING: Eat what you buy

Be mindful of leftovers and old ingredients that need using up. Designate an area in the fridge for food that should be eaten soon to prevent spoiling and post an EAT FIRST prompt as a visual reminder.

According to EPA, food waste is the #1 category of Municipal Solid Waste entering our landfills today, where it is further responsible for as much as 18% of methane emissions - a potent greenhouse gas. Having reduced the amount of waste we produce by following the suggestions above, the best thing we can do with the waste that remains, is to compost it. Let's review.

No matter how you treat it, all compost piles are made of three basic ingredients:

- Browns - carbon rich yard waste like branches, twigs and dead leaves
- Greens - nitrogen filled food waste like fruit and vegetable scraps, coffee grounds and grass clippings
- Water - in the presence of oxygen, the moisture needed to help break down organic material

Consistency of product and rate of return depend on a specific ratio of browns to greens and a precise turning schedule. While vital to industrial operations, and achievable in the back yard as well, neither is absolutely essential when time or inclination aren't an issue. In other words, be inspired by others work, but don't let their quest for the perfect compost keep you from composting yourself - it's only as difficult as you want it to be!

The main thing is to place your bin or pile in a dry, shady area near a water supply. Browns and greens can be added as collected, with fruit and vegetable waste occasionally covered with leaves and grass clippings to reduce odor. Twigs, wood chips and plant stalks, interspersed with denser material, promotes the passage of oxygen through the pile. A light watering should accompany dry material, and a tarp over the top can help retain heat and moisture. Turning the material intermittently increases the rate of decomposition but it's also important to give it time to mature. Whether a matter of months or years, success is determined as the dark, rich hummus builds at the bottom of the pile, ready for use in the garden.

In the end, keeping food waste out of the landfill is what really matters most. Whether that means sending it off for others to compost or digest, or doing it yourself, the quality of return will always be beneficial, but only if you keep it from becoming trash.

U.S. Food & Drug Administration Getting Smarter about Food Safety: The Pandemic and Lessons Learned

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, experts at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have learned valuable lessons that will help shape our work to create a more digital, transparent and safer food system.

Tracing Products Through the Supply Chain: Going Digital

Emerging digital technologies such as blockchain, which connects blocks of information in a public database, make it easier to track and trace food products through the supply chain - from the time that they are grown or manufactured, until purchase. Traceability is important - especially if we're trying to rapidly determine the source of a foodborne illness and remove adulterated food from the market.

Traceability is also useful in the event of a public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, you may have found your grocery store temporarily out of certain foods, or read about farmers plowing under crops because their customers had to close during the pandemic. Being able to trace foods makes the supply chain more transparent and may help the FDA and the food industry anticipate temporary supply imbalances and take proactive steps to meet your needs.

Better Protections When You Order Food Online

Did you order more foods online for home delivery as you sheltered in place? Are you confident the foods were produced, packed, and transported safely? Here again, the need for best practices has been highlighted by COVID-19.

One of the New Era of Smarter Food Safety focus areas is helping to ensure that temperature control, cross contamination and other safety issues are considered. The importance of this goal has become more apparent in the past few months as more consumers turn to their phone or laptop to order food as they hunker down at home.

We're All in This Together: Developing A Culture of Food Safety

Finally, if there's one thing we've learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's that whether we're consumers, farmers, factory workers or manufacturers, we're all in this together. Another core element of the New Era is the establishment and support of what we call food safety cultures on farms, in food facilities, and at home.

Before the pandemic, food safety culture meant addressing how the workers on farms and in food facilities think about food safety and demonstrate a commitment to this goal in how they do their job. The pandemic showed that a food safety culture is also about keeping those workers safe, and educating ourselves on the best food safety practices when we cook at home, which more of us are doing now.

This reflects one of the main lessons learned from COVID-19, says Yiannas, that we—government, industry and consumers—can and must work together to help keep each other safe. "What we have learned from the pandemic is that we're on the right track with the New Era of Smarter Food Safety. The steps that we'll take will prepare us to protect the safety of our food supply, no matter what challenges we face," he says. "We will get there together, stronger and more resilient than ever."



Shopping your fridge first is an important strategy for reducing food waste. Here's a recipe idea that will help you use what you have before buying more!

BASIC VEGETABLE STOCK

TURN THE WEEK'S TRIMMINGS INTO A FANTASTIC STOCK
Keep a lidded, reusable container in the freezer and add trimmings as you prep meals throughout the week. Then just put the veggies in the pot, cover with water, and crank up the heat.

MAKES:
1 quart

USES UP:
Veggie Scraps

INGREDIENTS:

Not every vegetable works well in a stock. Starches like turnips and potatoes get gummy, zucchini and green beans grow bitter, while broccoli, cauliflower, and peppers tend to dominate the flavor.

A basic vegetable stock should start with the following or their equivalent amount:

1-2 Onions
1 Bay Leaf

2-3 Carrots
1 Clove Garlic

3-4 Celery Stalks
Salt & Pepper to Taste

Optional Ingredients include:

Leeks
Tomatoes

Fennel
Mushrooms

Parsnips
Parsley

Basically, any vegetable that exhibits neutral but savory flavor will work.

DIRECTIONS:

Place the scraps in a medium-size saucepan and cover with cold water by 2 inches. Add the bay leaf and salt and pepper to taste. Slowly bring to a simmer over medium heat. Lower the heat and gently simmer for 1 hour. (Avoid simmering for an extended period of time. Vegetables that simmer for more than 2 hours will taste bitter.)

Remove from the heat and strain through a colander into a heatproof bowl. Compost the spent vegetables. Set the stock aside to cool to room temperature and allow any grit to settle. Carefully pour off the broth, leaving any sediment behind.

Store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or freeze for 6 months. Pressure can and your stock will be shelf stable for up to 1 year.

CREDIT: Eat it Up! by Sherri Brooks Vinton, Da Capo Lifelong Books 2016

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For those of you dedicated to the old school card file recipe box, here's the recipe in a 3"x5" format to print



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FOOD STORAGE TIPS FROM SAVETHEFOOD.COM

CUCUMBER

REFRIGERATE IT: Yes **AT FRESHEST:** 1 week

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Because their ideal temperature is somewhere between room temperature and refrigeration, cucumbers can be stored in a cool place on the counter or wrapped in a damp cloth and placed in a breathable bag in the high-humidity drawer of the refrigerator. Do not store near tomatoes, apples, avocados, or bananas. They are best if used within a few days, as more time at low temperatures can damage them.

FREEZING: Not recommended.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Peel or cut away any damaged flesh, and serve as usual.

Slightly overripe cucumbers can be bitter, but scooping out the seeds with a spoon before using helps minimize that bitterness. Many times the skin of the cucumber is undesirable, but the inside flesh is perfectly fine. In this case, simply peel the cucumber. Pickle, of course!

EGGPLANT

REFRIGERATE IT: No **AT FRESHEST:** 1 week

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Store loose or in a breathable bag in a cool place. Refrigeration can lead to browning and off-flavors.

FREEZING: Wash, peel, slice about 1/3-in/8-mm thick, blanch with 1/2 cup/120 ml lemon juice per 1 gal/3.8 L water, immerse in ice water, drain, then freeze in airtight container, leaving 1/2-in/12-mm headspace.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: Salt the flesh of older eggplant to remove bitterness.

GARLIC AND SHALLOTS

REFRIGERATE IT: Unpeeled, no; peeled, yes **AT FRESHEST:** Unpeeled, a few weeks to several months (garlic will last a bit longer); peeled, up to several weeks

OPTIMAL STORAGE: Store unpeeled garlic and shallots in a cool, dark, and dry place in a well-ventilated container such as a basket or mesh bag. Do not store in plastic. To help prevent the heads from drying out, leave the papery skin on and break off cloves as needed. If peeled, store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

FREEZING: Peel garlic or chop shallots and store in an airtight container. Both will lose crispness when thawed but will retain most of their flavor.

USE IT UP/REVIVAL: In gardens, green garlic leaves can be used just like green onions. Similarly, if garlic grows a shoot while in storage, that can be eaten as well. Even garlic flowers are edible and have a mild flavor. Blend garlic with basil or blanched kale stems and other ingredients to make a pesto, which can be frozen for up to 6 months.

To download the entire Food Storage Guide, go to www.savethefood.com/food-storage

QUICK TRICKS

Ingredient Substitutes

Alice Henneman, MS, RDN, Extension Educator

Ever have a missing ingredient ruin a recipe or require an extra trip to the store? Try these food substitutes - it may differ slightly, but will still be acceptable in terms of flavor, texture & appearance.

Product: 1 small clove Garlic

Substitute: 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

Product: 1 Tbsp Finely Cut Fresh Herbs

Substitute: 1 tsp Dried Leaf Herbs OR 1/2 tsp Ground Dried Herbs

Product: 1 tsp Lemon Zest

Substitute: 1/2 tsp Lemon Extract

Product: 1 cup Miniature Marshmallows

Substitute: 10 Large Marshmallows

Product: 1 cup Mayonnaise (in salad dressings)

Substitute: 1 cup Sour Cream OR 1 cup Yogurt OR 1 cup Cottage Cheese pureed in a blender OR a combination of any of the above

Product: 1 tsp Dry Mustard (in cooked mixtures)

Substitute: 1 Tbsp Prepared Mustard

For more waste reducing tips, go to:

food.unl.edu/cook-it-quick-documents/makeover-your-leftovers.pdf

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