



## **Making Food Go Further:** Creating A Zero-Waste Kitchen

By Denny Scholl

As people increasingly reject plastic and excess packaging, the concept of zero waste has grown in popularity. But we tend to forget about actual food waste (roughly 133 billion pounds a year).

A zero-waste kitchen should make each item of food in the kitchen last longer so that almost nothing ends up in the trash.

### **8 Ways to Create a Zero-Waste Kitchen**

Some of these concepts are obvious, and others are a little more creative, but they can all stretch your food budget.

The following tips and tricks can help you create your own zero-waste kitchen.

### **Store Food Effectively**

Ever have to toss out flour infested with weevils or celery stalks that have gone completely limp? The first trick to making food last longer is proper storage.



Grains, dry beans, and flour should always be stored in clean, well-sealed containers. Saving glass jars comes in handy for this purpose.

You can store many leafy greens, herbs, and celery in the fridge with the cut submerged in water, like cut flowers.

Store fruits clean and dry and try not to keep them together – they can release a natural gas that causes rapid ripening.

Learning proper storage techniques for fresh foods will save you a lot of waste.

## Make Meal Plans

Plan your meals before you shop to ensure that you only buy what you need. If you're shopping by price and stocking up on sale items or collecting food from a pantry, get creative and be open to new recipe ideas.

Using a flexible plan, such as using a main dish paired with whatever vegetable is fresh and available, can give your meal plans structure.

## Organize your Food Items



You don't have to keep an inventory for every item in the fridge, but having an organized system will keep you from throwing out food that has spoiled.

Even a system as simple as putting the freshest items toward the back and the older stuff up front is enough to remind you when food will expire.

Keeping an inventory of fresh food and staples is a little extra work, but pays off by promising you'll never waste time sorting through the pantry trying to figure out if you have what you need for a recipe.

## Get Creative With Leftovers



Sure, some folks are perfectly happy to eat the same dish three days in a row, but others (especially kids) are not. Cooking strategically can repurpose the same large batch of beans into many meals.

How this works: Beans and rice one night can morph into refried bean tacos or nachos the next, then can be turned into bean burgers, and eventually fashioned into a bean soup or stew.

If repurposing is out of the question, consider freezing and labeling food for later.

Soups are especially handy for a low-energy night of no cooking.

## Use Stems and Stalks

Many greens get thrown in the trash, a disturbing fact when you consider that 42 million people in the U.S. **don't have enough to eat.**

Carrot tops, turnip greens, radish greens, and beet greens are packed with nutrients and can be used to create dishes of their own.

Greens from root vegetables can be sauteed or pureed with a little garlic, salt, and lemon juice to make a zesty pesto.

Shred broccoli stalks and add to salad or blend into a creamy soup base.

Before you discard a stem or stalk, consider what else you can use it for.

### Save Trimmings and Bones for Broth

As trendy as “bone broth” has become, the practice of boiling bones and trimmings into a soup base, or stock, is nothing new.

Instead of tossing out chicken bones and carcasses, save them in the freezer until you have enough to make a rich broth.

Bone broth is nutritious, and you can store it in the freezer until you’re ready to use it.

## Preserve Foods

The art of preservation dates back to a time before refrigeration. Canning jams, jellies, and sauces takes a little time and effort, but if you have access to a large amount of fresh produce, it can be worth the effort.

Something as simple as a neighborhood fruit tree can yield enough bounty to keep you in frozen fruit and jars of jam year-round.

## Compost Your Kitchen Waste

Even if the only garden area you have is a patio, composting your kitchen waste is an easy way to transform your vegetable and fruit waste into rich, organic soil.



There are plenty of DIY composting bins you can create for the yard. As long as you **keep pests out of your compost**, these bins are hassle-free zero waste solutions.

## Why a Zero-Waste Kitchen Makes Sense

No one wants to waste food. All our food scraps, tossed leftovers, and other wasted food adds up to **roughly 133 billion pounds** a year.

With eight ways to create a zero-waste kitchen outlined above, maybe you have near-zero reasons not to adopt some or all of these methods.

But besides making a difference by reducing landfill garbage, here are two ways a zero-waste kitchen saves you in the pantry and the pocketbook:

## Make your Food Last Longer

With a little planning and strategy, you can stretch the food in your pantry and refrigerator far beyond what you might consider its capacity.

## Cut your Grocery Bill

A zero-waste kitchen stretches your budget, too. Planning your meals, getting creative with your leftovers, and canning fruits and vegetables cut your grocery bill. You may never have to buy another jar of jam, jelly or chow chow again.

*Denny Scholl is a third-generation farmer who hopes to pass his 5-acre farm down to his sons one day. He grows green beans, tomatoes, potatoes, and zucchini for his family and neighbors who visit him at the local farmers market. What he doesn't sell, he barter for baked goods or donates to the local food bank.*

Find more [resources from Minnie's Food Pantry here](#).