

## Keep calm and cook on Zero-waste cooking in a time of crisis

Less is more—for everyone else.

During the Second World War, Canadian households practiced zero-waste cooking by fully using the food they had - scraping every bowl, and wringing every drop of flavor out of their rationed ingredients. In the past five years, zero-waste cooking has found its way back into the zeitgeist as a tool to help minimize the environmental impact of landfills, protect our natural resources, and help reduce food inequality. The current pandemic has underscored the need to double down on our efforts. Almost overnight, the coronavirus pandemic has added a new urgency to preventing food waste and adopting zero-waste cooking as an act that can help save the future of the planet.

Within the past week, long lineups and panic buying have become commonplace in grocery stores across the country, resulting in empty shelves and a disconcerting sense of unease. During “normal times”, over 60% of the food that Canadians throw out is avoidable. With a modicum of creativity and resourcefulness, we can dramatically curb the amount of edible food that goes to waste. Satisfying dishes can be created from scraps, trimmings, and orphaned ingredients.

Here’s a quick list of easy saves:

**Start with the stems:** Stems and ribs from kale, swiss chard, parsley, and cilantro, can all be sautéed and/or added to salads of all sorts. And cauliflower and broccoli stems can be peeled and sliced or julienned for stir fries or slaws.

**Top it up:** Beet, celery, radish and turnip tops, as well as fennel fronds are all 100% edible, surprisingly full of flavor, and full of nutrients. Use them in stews, salads, stir fries and minestrone.

**Zest it:** You bought the citrus for the flesh and juice, and the rind came along for the ride. Don’t toss it. The thin outer layer of all citrus fruit is intensely flavored and extremely aromatic. Grate it with a microplane (before consuming the interior), and use it on fish, in pastas, on yogurt, and anywhere else you want to brighten the flavor.

**Recycle oil:** Oils from oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, artichokes, roasted peppers and anchovies can all be used on bruschetta and pizza, in salad dressings, and in pestos and dips.

**Free the fat:** Nothing infuses flavor like bacon, chicken or duck fat. When you cook any of these proteins, save the fat, and use judicious amounts in place of, or along, with oils or butter when cooking.

**Rescue the rinds:** The outer rinds of Parmigiano Reggiano, Grada Padano, Pecorino and other hard cheeses impart richness when simmered in sauces, soups, stocks, beans and stews. Be sure to fish it out before serving, because the rind never truly dissolves. Well-wrapped rinds-in-waiting will last almost indefinitely in the fridge or freezer.

**Get crusty:** Save your stale bread and make breadcrumbs. A sprinkle of rustic fried breadcrumbs will add a pleasing crunch to pastas, soups, green salads, bean salads and various vegetables.

**Take stock:** The carcasses of a couple of roasted or store-bought rotisserie chickens (saved in the freezer), and a bag of rescued vegetable cuttings (fresh or frozen), can be turned into a deeply-flavored stock with minimal effort. Use in soups, risotto, quinoa, polenta and braised dishes.

Once you start rescuing and repurposing ingredients, you will quickly discover that in these times of uncertainty, nothing is more comforting than making use of every last precious morsel. I'm optimistic that a change in our cooking habits will be an unexpected silver lining in this time of crisis, as we all come together to nourish each other in ways that benefit our bodies, our mental health, our communities, and our planet.

We all benefit when we share our food saving tips and recipes. In the weeks ahead, I encourage you to get creative and resourceful - sharing food-saving tips and recipes with friends and family. For inspiration on how to rediscover the value of food, check out Love Food Hate Waste Canada at <http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.ca>

There will be a time when we go back to congregating in large groups, traveling on a whim, and touching our faces without fear. But hopefully, zero-waste cooking will be a consciousness that stays with us long after the air has cleared.

*Bob Blumer is a Food Network host, cookbook author, and ambassador for Love Food, Hate Waste Canada.*