

LEARNING MADE EASY



# Zero Waste Cooking

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Make the most of what  
you have with over 100 recipes

Organize your kitchen for  
zero waste success

Waste less, save money,  
eat well

**Rosanne Rust, MS, RDN**

Internationally recognized  
nutrition expert



# Zero Waste Cooking

by Rosanne Rust, MS, RDN

**for  
dummies**  
A Wiley Brand

## **Zero Waste Cooking For Dummies®**

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# Zero Waste Cooking For Dummies®

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# Introduction

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Up to 40 percent of the food produced doesn't get eaten. This is a waste of not only food but also all the resources it took to produce, process, and deliver that food.

Food and food systems have deep cultural roots, playing a major role in our lifestyles, celebrations, and livelihoods. My experiences interviewing and counseling people about what and how they eat offers me important insights into their "whys," too. In some cases, food is a comfort, part of an identity, or simply a basic need. In other cases, diet is a form of medical therapy — in that dietary change can improve a medical condition or help manage a disease. In addition, changes in food choices are now made with the environment in mind. But for any of that to work, the individual must accept, and sustain, the change.

My philosophy about food and eating habits is one of reason. For dietary changes to have any impact — whether on your body, your budget, or the environment — those changes must be reasonable and doable. Extreme measures are rarely sustainable. Zero waste cooking can save you money and may even improve your nutrient intake. It also has a positive impact on the environment, reducing the overall methane emissions that result from the food waste that goes from your kitchen to landfills. This book aims to help you reduce your food waste, no matter what you eat.

## *About This Book*

This book aims to help and encourage you to waste less food.

Many zero waste cooking books adopt the notion that to have a positive impact on the environment, you must focus almost entirely on eating more plants and removing animal products from the diet. This book doesn't. The notion that everyone can (or wants to) adopt a vegetarian diet is simply unrealistic. Instead, this book encourages you to give more thought to what you eat, and what you throw away, while you begin to adopt a budget-friendly diet that balances your use of a variety of foods with less waste and less harm to the environment.

The goal of this book isn't to shame you into overhauling your diet, tell you what to eat, or make you feel guilty about your food choices. Rather, my goal in writing this book is to share some facts about how food waste impacts the environment and why reducing food waste is important, help you understand where your food comes from, provide information on food safety and nutrition, and ultimately help you get started with zero waste cooking.

Reducing food waste is a big challenge for the whole world, so this book is here to help you keep things in perspective. Practice and progress, not perfection, is the expectation.

When I wrote the recipes in this book, I used easy-to-find ingredients and also tried to provide recipes in which you can easily swap in similar ingredients you have on hand that you need to use up (or that you prefer). In most cases, a similar ingredient will result in just as tasty and successful of a dish — especially if it leads to you wasting less food. As you read the recipes, keep these conventions in mind:

» Oven temperatures are listed in degrees Fahrenheit.

- » A “pinch” of salt is assumed to be  $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon. “Salt to taste” suggests your judgement in how much you salt the food.
- » All eggs are large.
- » Flour used is all-purpose flour, but feel free to use gluten free, whole wheat, or any other replacement flour.
- » When fresh meat or vegetables are listed in a recipe, cooked can often be substituted.
- » Canned or frozen vegetables and fruits can replace fresh.
- » All milk is 1% fat, but whole, 2%, or nonfat milk can be used instead. Of course, if you don’t tolerate cow’s milk, feel free to use a milk alternative such as soy milk.
- » I created the recipes using plain nonfat Greek yogurt, light sour cream, and light cream cheese, but regular plain yogurt, regular fat sour cream, and regular cream cheese can be used as substitutes.
- » I recommend using freshly ground peppercorns from a peppermill, but regular ground pepper is also fine to use.
- » Dried herbs can be used in place of fresh.
- 🍅 The small tomato icon indicates the recipe is vegetarian or contains no meat, but it may contain eggs or dairy.

To make the content more accessible, this book is divided into four parts. You don’t have to read from beginning to end but can turn to any part — or any chapter — at any time and reference back and forth as often as you need. I put a lot of heart and research into writing this book so, of course, I think every word is

important, but some pieces of information aren't essential, but are there to help you understand the overall food waste topic. These details appear in sidebars (shaded gray boxes), and you can feel free to skip them without missing any key zero waste cooking information.

Within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

## ***Foolish Assumptions***

In writing this book, I made some assumptions about you:

- » You have an interest in cooking, saving money, staying healthy, and wasting less.
- » You want to be a good steward to the environment, and you feel overwhelmed with all the “stuff” in your life.
- » You have access to a kitchen, with a refrigerator-freezer, stove top, oven, and possibly a microwave, and have basic cooking tools.
- » You have basic cooking skills, you're busy, and you aren't interested in getting too fancy in the kitchen.
- » You want to reduce your food waste, do more with the ingredients you have on hand, and get more creative with recipes.

If this sounds like you, then you're in the right place!

# *Icons Used in This Book*

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for your attention. Here are the icons you'll encounter and a brief description of each.



**TIP**

The Tip icon marks shortcuts that can save you time or money or make zero waste cooking easier.



**REMEMBER**

Remember icons mark the information that's especially important to know. If you're short on time, siphon off the most important information in each chapter by skimming through to look at these icons.



**TECHNICAL  
STUFF**

When I get into the weeds of the subject matter, you'll see the Technical Stuff icon. This icon marks information that is a bit more technical, so if you aren't into it, you can skip over these sections without missing out on the major focus of the chapter.



**WARNING**

Look out! The Warning icon tells you about information that could relate to your safety. It marks important information that may save you headaches or prevent you from being misled.



# ***Beyond the Book***

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to zero waste cooking that I provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at [Dummies.com](http://Dummies.com). Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for "Zero Waste Cooking For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

## ***Where to Go from Here***

The joy of For Dummies books is that you can start anywhere. If you're already on a zero waste journey and just need an idea for dinner tonight, then go straight to the recipes in [Part 3](#). From starters to soups to sides to sweet and savory snacks and more, [Chapters 8](#) to [17](#) have you covered. For quick zero food waste tips, just head straight to [Part 4](#).

If you're just beginning to research the issue of food waste, then start at the beginning in [Part 1](#). Your kitchen is just one part of the food waste issue, so [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) look at the bigger picture of the food supply chain. If you're the type of person who likes to sit and think things through before you take action, then head to [Chapter 3](#) where I get into the details that help you assess your current food waste so you can take a good look at your habits.

For more about organizing your kitchen for zero waste, check out [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#).

As a registered dietitian, I had to include some information in the book about nutrition. I created all the recipes with both health and the optimal use of ingredients to reduce food waste in mind. If you want to

find out more about staying healthy on a budget, head to [Chapter 6](#).

And if meal planning is your jam, [Chapters 7](#) offers four weeks of meals that help you waste less by making the most of your shopping list.

I hope this book changes your perception of food and the environment and your role in it. I hope it's a reference that you can count on to help you make the most of what you have by creating healthy meals that minimize food waste.

## **Part 1**

# **Adopting a Food Waste Strategy**

## **IN THIS PART ...**

Find out how adopting a zero waste cooking method benefits you and the environment.

Learn the basics of kitchen organization so you can begin zero waste cooking.

Understand what sustainability really means.

Discover zero waste action steps that fit your lifestyle.

# Chapter 1

## Doing Your Best to Waste Less

---

### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Rethinking your shopping habits for zero waste
  - » Discovering the benefits of zero waste cooking
  - » Understanding the framework of food and environment
- 

An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the food supply in the United States is wasted due to loss (never delivered or prepared) and waste (thrown away). That's more than 130 billion pounds of food per year! Hard to imagine, right? Maybe not when you consider how every day, shoppers are enticed to buy food in bulk but often end up throwing away the excess. Or how, all too often, diners bag up restaurant leftovers only to let them languish in the fridge (or, worse yet, in their car's back seat), and then throw them out, packaging and all. What do these examples have in common? Good intentions, yes. But also, unnecessary waste.

Many of us may not even realize how often we waste food, nor the impact that waste can have on our communities. When you make a concerted effort to avoid waste, you won't be throwing away money or nutrition. Reducing your food waste has the potential to have a positive impact on your health, your budget, and the environment. This realization makes it even more

convincing to work on wasting less, and that effort begins at home.

## ***What Is Zero Waste Cooking?***

Zero waste cooking is a strategy to reduce food waste. It's about using all the food that you purchase, grow, or have access to, and leaving behind as little food and packaging as possible. It's something to feel good about as you save money and reduce your impact on the planet.



**REMEMBER** Zero waste cooking is *not* about perfection or self-righteousness. Neither is it about becoming vegetarian or eating less meat. Be wary of statements about avoiding meat and dairy when in the context of zero waste cooking. The goal of zero waste cooking is to reduce all food waste.

Zero waste cooking is about adopting a philosophy to waste less food in your household no matter what your dietary choices are (of course I still want you to make mostly healthy ones!). It's about learning how to grocery shop more mindfully and efficiently to maximize your food and your food budget. It's also about having a plan for the food you buy and storing food properly.

### ***Using food and ingredients wisely***

In the United States and many parts of the world, we're blessed with an abundant food supply. We travel to grocery stores, expecting all the food and ingredients that we desire to be there. (Skip to [Chapter 2](#) to learn more about the food supply chain and where your food

comes from.) We expect our apples and tomatoes to be blemish-free and our food to be fresh and appealing. We purchase what we need (and sometimes more than we need) and bring it home to store on our shelves or refrigerator or freezer. You could say, we're a little spoiled.

To create a zero waste kitchen, you simply begin by being more thoughtful about your purchases. You then start to rethink your leftovers and plan out how you're going to prepare every ingredient that goes into your shopping cart. You also may have some second thoughts about perfect produce, realizing that a small blemish here or there doesn't impact the safety or nutrition of the food.

## ***Shopping for what you need and storing it properly***

Zero waste cooking focuses on shopping for what you *need*, not what randomly "looks good." Grocery stores strategically set up their shelves and displays to entice you to buy more. They place seasonal items at your eye level, and companies pay a premium for the best shelf placement. But shopping only for what you need will ultimately help reduce your food waste. You'll find lots of tips and strategies for sticking to your food budget and grocery list in [Chapter 6](#).

A good shopping list makes trips to the grocery store more efficient. Your list should include everything you need to create meals for the next week or two. You might break your list into a big order or a few smaller orders, so think of your list as a running inventory as well. These are planned purchases that fit your budget and meal planning. [Chapter 4](#) helps you analyze what you have, what you don't use or need, and what may be ending up

in your garbage can too often. Here are a few reminders to get you started:

- » **Use a list.** Consider a digital app or keeping a running list on your smartphone.
- » **Delay a purchase.** When you see that tantalizing endcap, tell yourself to make a note and think about it for your next trip. This will eliminate an impulse buy but not deny the possibility of putting the item into your cart next time.
- » **Don't overspend.** Have a budget in mind before you go and keep a rough total as you shop.
- » **Choose quality over quantity.** In most cases, it's worth paying more for a high-quality food product (say, cheese) than getting a larger portion of it (more than you may need or be able to use).
- » **Store food properly.** Once you bring the food home, storing it properly helps preserve its quality and safety longer, thereby helping you reduce food waste. [Chapters 4](#), [5](#), and [6](#) offer you lots of ideas and tips for making food and ingredients last longer. You may be surprised to find out what those best-by dates really mean, or why you shouldn't store avocados near bananas.

## ***Making the most of scraps and leftovers***

There are two kinds of people: those who love leftovers (usually the cooks of the house!), and those who say, meh. I hope this book inspires you to look beyond reheating a plate of turkey and mashed potatoes or a bowl of chili and instead create completely new dishes with those previously cooked ingredients.



As a wise cook once said, “Cook once; eat thrice.” Making use of leftovers, as well as doing some batch cooking, will save you both time and money. It’ll also take some of the day in, day out stress out of preparing dinner every night.



TIP

You don’t have to eat trendy foods to eat a well-balanced zero waste diet. Avocadoes may be all the rage, but they’re not the be-all and end-all for nutrition (and they spoil rapidly). No *one* food holds that health halo. It’s the totality of your diet through the week that impacts your nutrition status and your environmental footprint. Healthy food doesn’t have to be fancy or expensive.

The meal planning ideas in [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) use the concept of creating a grocery list with common ingredients that you can use in various ways through the week to make different meals.



REMEMBER

Some foods simply taste better the next day or two. Dishes like chilis, soups, casserole dishes, or lasagna, for instance, get even better after they sit for a while, allowing all the flavors to come together. You won’t regret making extra servings when you cook those dishes.

## ***Adopting a Zero Waste Mindset***

You probably picked up this book because you want to waste less in your kitchen and you care about the environment. The goal of the book is to help you get started and maintain a mostly zero waste lifestyle (*mostly* because, hey, nobody is perfect). While [Chapter 3](#) gets into the nitty-gritty of creating a zero waste mindset, an overarching theme throughout the book is “progress, not perfection.” As you wrap your mind around the idea of wasting less food, the book addresses several things:

- » How the idea of sustainability fits into a zero waste mindset (see more in [Chapter 2](#))
- » The three pillars of sustainability in agriculture and how they allow for the efficient use of natural resources to feed hundreds of millions of people
- » How various sectors of the food supply chain conserve resources and work to reduce food waste
- » How to analyze your personal food waste habits and create a plan to waste less
- » How to choose foods with both your budget and health needs in mind
- » How to organize a zero waste kitchen
- » How to plan meals, waste less, and cook delicious meals

You may wonder why I cover things like sustainability, the food supply chain, and the U.S. agriculture system that brings you your food. Well, it’s important to know how the environmental piece of reducing food waste fits into the larger picture of where food comes from. There’s a lot of conflicting information about the “best diet,” the many sources of greenhouse gas emissions, and how various sectors impact the environment.

Hopefully, this information will give you more to think about.



REMEMBER

Many things impact climate change. This book assumes that the more than 333 million people in the United States have a variety of food budgets and circumstances. This book was written with the broad spectrum of food budgets and food availability, both rural and urban, in mind. The recipes and meal planning strategies I include were designed for everyone — not just those with a specialty grocer down the block — so they can enjoy eating for good health and learn how to waste less.

## ***Benefiting from a Zero Waste Approach***

Zero waste cooking can save you money, improve your diet quality, and help the environment. You could say it's a win-win-win! You may be reading this book because you want to do your part to support a healthy planet, or maybe you want to waste less and save money, but you may not be aware that a zero waste approach may also indirectly improve your health. How? Well, there's money savings in taking a little bit of time to work on your grocery shopping strategy and use of leftovers. And when you become more mindful of food storage, meal planning, and using up fresh fruits and vegetables, you actually end up increasing your consumption of those nutrient-rich foods. Read on, dear reader.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that, in 2018, 63 million tons of food were wasted, with

40 percent of that coming from households like yours and mine. Check out apps such as Too Good To Go that help connect people in need with surplus food supplies that they can purchase at deeply discounted rates.

Wasting food isn't just an environmental issue; it's a social issue, too. It's estimated that about 10 percent of U.S. households are food insecure at some time during the year. And hunger and undernourishment throughout the world continue to be a major concern.



TIP

Feeding America is an organization that works to reduce food waste and hunger by matching excess food from national food and grocery manufacturers, retailers, government agencies, shippers, packers and growers, and other organizations, with the food banks that need it most. Many agricultural organizations donate milk, meat, and eggs to local food banks and community organizations as well. To get involved, check with your local food bank or go to [www.feedingamerica.org/take-action](http://www.feedingamerica.org/take-action).

## ***Saving green while going green***

Sure, you want to save the earth, but don't forget that creating a zero waste kitchen is also going to save you money. All that food waste adds up to more than \$160 billion each year (retail and consumer waste). Some estimate that this equates to about \$1,500 a year per household. Whew! That's lot of missed meal creations.

Just think about all the fun experiences you could buy with the money you're going to save on your zero waste journey. Or maybe you can donate some of that money to a worthy charity of your choice.



TIP

One way to start working on this right away is to designate a “food scrap bowl” to keep in your refrigerator. This bowl or container can hold things that you normally might throw away (old bananas, carrot tops, bruised fruit, dried-out tomatoes). After a few days, check out what you have and head to [Part 3](#), where you’ll find recipes that are especially versatile for cooking with bits and scraps.



TIP

Consider using a community-supported agriculture (CSA) system to purchase seasonal produce from local farmers. The way this works is locally grown produce is shipped to your door weekly, which can save you money on your food bill and saves gas and transportation. You could even split it with a friend or neighbor.

Another great way to save money is by buying “ugly” or imperfect produce. Your local grocer may have a reduced-price shelf. There are several companies that funnel less-than-perfect produce from processors to sell directly to consumers at discounts, too. Keep in mind that farmers and food manufacturers are also always working toward reducing food waste. For instance, a bruised apple doesn’t get bagged, but it goes into the apple juice or applesauce line at the packaging plant. Find more ideas in [Chapter 6](#).

## ***Enjoying better nutrition and health***

Using a CSA may also inspire you to enjoy a wider variety of food, but so can simply adopting a zero waste kitchen strategy. Fruits and vegetables are often the

items that get forgotten in the refrigerator. Sure, you had big intentions for them when you put them into your grocery cart, but then, oops, a few too many days go by.

When you adopt a better shopping strategy, you'll soon find you're getting more creative and seeking out more recipes to use up the food and produce items you have. In the end, that's a win for nutrition — and the planet!

My nutrition philosophy is to educate about food and nutrition, guide people in how their food choices may impact their personal health and lifestyle, and then allow them to make choices within that framework.



**REMEMBER** As you make the most of what you have and you create a plan going forward, your overall diet will likely, coincidentally, improve as well. Consider times when you ordered takeout and would forgo cooking what was in the fridge. A zero waste mindset can give you that little nudge you need to rethink some food waste decisions, saving you money and improving your diet. Maybe you still order takeout, but you make a firm plan to cook up the previously planned meal the next day. Another win!

### ***Sharing the plate***

Full disclosure: I'm an omnivore. I enjoy a variety of food, and my diet has the framework of a Mediterranean DASH diet (check out the latest edition of *DASH Diet For Dummies*). This is what works for both my health and my eating preferences.

Instead of pressuring fellow omnivores to avoid meat, I'd rather encourage them to add more vegetables and grains to their dishes, so in this book, I try to offer a variety of recipes that may appeal to many palates. In