

Paying attention to what we cook can help reduce food waste

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“A lot of it comes down to menu planning, buying smaller amounts of things, knowing how to store different kinds of fruits and vegetables,” says Katrina Brink. Credit: Matt Nager

Americans waste about 35 million tons of food every year—enough, by some estimates, to fill the Rose Bowl every day. Discarding food squanders natural resources and hurts the environment, as rotting food in landfills is a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas. It squanders money, too. An average family of four throws out between

\$1,500 and \$2,400 worth of food annually.

That last number is apt to motivate people to start thinking about less wasteful ways to shop and cook. Katrina Brink, N13, took it as a starting point for her Denver-based business, The Empowered Kitchen.

Brink offers cooking classes that use healthy, seasonal recipes and focus on saving money and reducing waste. Food waste, she says, is an issue that affects both the developed and the developing world—but for very different reasons.

In the developing world, the problem is primarily one of distribution. The [food](#) that is grown can't get to the people who need it. In developed countries like the U.S., however, food is tossed all along the line—from less-than-perfect produce left in the field or that grocery stores can't sell, to uneaten food on restaurant plates, to the "forgotten" food that goes bad in our refrigerators. "I refer to the crisper drawer as the place where vegetables go to die," she says.

Brink offers her classes through community-education venues around Denver, as well as in people's homes and at workplace events. A summer class, for example, might focus on easy salads, chilled soups or no-bake lasagna—recipes that can be prepared quickly on a hot evening and will efficiently use a week's worth of produce with little waste.

Some tricks: saving scraps to make stock, making pesto from the leftover bits of vegetables, and turning bread ends into bread crumbs.

"A lot of it comes down to menu planning, buying smaller amounts of things, knowing how to store different kinds of fruits and vegetables," Brink says. In other words: putting the "crisp" back in the crisper.

Provided by Tufts University

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