

# REDUCING FOOD WASTE THROUGH COMPOSTING

BY AMY CAVALIER

Join the Rochester Minimalists on Tuesday, May 9 from 6:-00-8:00 p.m. at the Coffee Connection at the Greenhouse Cafe, 2271 E Main St, Rochester, New York 14609. There will be a demonstration on in-home composting by Amber Powers, a passionate supporter of the environmental justice movement in Rochester, followed by a presentation from Community Composting, a curbside composting service in Rochester.

## TURN SCRAPS INTO PAYDIRT!

Don't pitch those food scraps. Set up an at-home compost system!

-Get three rubber storage totes and one lid. Wash the containers and dry overnight.

-Drill several 1/8-inch holes in the bottom and sides of two of totes.

-The container without holes will be used to catch liquid. Fill it with rocks to ensure a four-inch clearing between the bottom tote and the first worm bed.

-Prepare a worm bed in one of the totes with holes using newspaper clippings, coffee grinds or straw, topped off with soil. Sprinkle water on the bedding to create a moist environment. Allow it to soak in for 24 hours before adding worms.

-Check online or with your local gardening club to obtain worms.

-Add worms to the worm bed along with food scraps in the corners. Keep the compost covered to prevent light from getting in and to keep the compost moist.

-Fill with food scraps over time.

Avoid dairy, meat or fish products, animal feces or excessive citrus or oily scraps.

When the first tray is full of composted matter, remove the worms and use the soil in your plants. -Prepare another worm bed tray, add worms and start the process over.

-Leaves and yard clippings can be easily composted outdoors in a wooden bin, old car tires, or a large wire mesh panel zip-tied into a ring.

## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Learning to love leftovers could save you a pretty penny.

Before you scrap those potato peels, try soaking them in water, tossing them in olive oil, adding a pinch of sea salt and baking them in the oven for a crispy treat. How about those berries you didn't finish? Toss them in the freezer for a smoothie later.

"If someone has spent the resources and done the work to grow food, it should not be wasted," said Elizabeth Henderson, an organic farmer in Newark, New York.

It's estimated that Americans waste \$165 billion dollars in food each year. That costs the average American family of four anywhere from \$1,365 to \$2,275, estimates the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

From the grocery store to the plate all the way to the garbage, there are ways you can save money and help reduce food waste.

## DON'T JUDGE A VEGETABLE BY ITS SHAPE

About seven percent of food never leaves the farm because it doesn't meet the standard for shape and color, according to a report by the NRDC. Still another \$15 billion worth of unsold fruits and vegetables alone are thrown out each year at the store, estimates the United States Department of Agriculture.

"We have created a monster by purchasing and displaying only pristine foods and now customers expect it," said Tricia Banks.

Banks oversees Flower City Pickers Mission which collects



about 3,000 pounds of food each week at the City of Rochester Public Market in New York. The food is donated to over 20 shelters and soup kitchens or to local farmers for their pigs.

"I think grocers would love the opportunity to sell less beautiful food, but are afraid that they would lose customers," Banks added. "It may also end up being more work for them since some of these foods may have a shorter shelf life and they would have to rotate their product more often."

Don't overlook that crooked carrot, oddly-shaped head of broccoli or blemished tomato though, said Henderson. Sometimes farms will sell imperfect produce at a discount which can still be cooked, made into sauce or frozen once you cut out damaged areas.

## SHOP COOPERATIVELY

Where you shop can also make a difference in reducing food waste. At Abundance Food Co-op, a cooperatively owned grocery store in

Rochester, New York, food sustainability and minimizing waste is essential to their business.

"Our shoppers and owners believe food matters; how it's grown or made, how it tastes and how it impacts the world around us," said Chris Whitebell, Marketing and Outreach Manager.

Abundance offers produce that is not as fresh as the standard selection at a reduced price.

"Most of the time the produce is perfectly edible and tasty, but might not look very pretty," he said. "It's a great way to get high quality, organic produce for a low price."

Anything that doesn't get sold goes to the staff to take home or to Community Composting which turns the food waste into soil for Rochester gardens.

Henderson was the founder of Peacework Organic Community Supported Agriculture, one of the oldest CSA's in the country. Along with

their share of vegetables each season, Peacework members receive information about short and long-term storage and use of food. Anything that doesn't get picked up goes to a local soup kitchen and a program which teaches youth about the importance of a localized community food system.

"None of our food goes to waste," she said.

## RETHINKING LEFTOVERS

Freezing, preserving, dehydrating are a few ways to keep food out of the trash. Besides peppers and berries, produce should be blanched before freezing, Henderson advises. Vegetable peels or bones from meat can be boiled in water to make broth. Potato and sweet potato skins or left over kale can be made into chips.

"All kinds of interesting chips are made from vegetables," she said.

Whitebell said it's also good to learn to love and anticipate leftovers!