

village view

by Andrea Leonard

With food prices at new highs, you wouldn't expect to find much food in people's garbage. Although no one's announced a study of food waste on the Cape, one's been conducted in Arizona and it indicates a surprising quantity of food is thrown away.

The average family in Tucson throws out ten per cent of the food it purchases. If the same pattern prevails throughout the country, not only is this an appalling piddling away of hard-earned dollars, but food-waste, while humans starve, is down-right immoral.

The Arizona study, made by an archaeologist, pinpoints middle-income families as the most wasteful. Since the majority of Cape Codders fit that description, and since what's true of one group in the United States can reasonably be assumed to be true of a similar group in another location, maybe it's worthwhile asking "Why?"

No sensible housewife willingly and knowingly wastes ten per cent of her food purchases. If food is wasted, it may be because housewives don't realize it, and don't know how to use leftovers.

Could you, perhaps, save ten dollars a month on your food budget and eat just as well? If so, the savings would go a long way toward helping to meet increases in heating or gasoline bills.

Before you flat-outright deny such a quantity of food could become garbage in your kitchen, put it to the test. Get a couple of plastic ice cream containers, the ones with snap-on lids, to keep next to your sink.

Instead of scraping plates into the trash or down the disposal, and instead of unthinkingly tossing out moldy bits saved 'til they spoiled, put everything once fit to eat into a container. Judge from how often it fills up how much you're actually wasting.

(Once you get into the habit of separating food wastes from trash you may as well start a compost heap. Then at least you'll be making good soil, returning nutrients to your own garden.)

And, if you find you are wasting food, you'll want to learn to eliminate all possible waste. If you're throwing out peelings and parings, consider that most of the nutrition in vegetables lies just under the skin. Thinner parings or just a thorough scrubbing with a stiff brush could add vitamins, bulk and trace elements to your diet.

If your garbage is mostly plate-scrappings, maybe you're serving larger portions than your family wants or needs. We're told most Americans are overweight and are a nation of fatties because we eat too much.

Perhaps your family rejects warmed-over food. Or perhaps you don't know how to prepare it appealingly for the second-time-around.

Thrifty housewives consider time given to preparing meals their families will eat with pleasure time well-spent indeed.

So how do you use up leftovers? While meat may appear to be our most costly food, the price of everything we serve climbs higher each week. Completely using all edibles makes good sense.

Suppose you've a few leftover boiled potatoes? Can you use them for potato salad? You can. Even if they were prepared originally for beef stew or chicken fricasse, these flavors will enhance the salad, not hurt it. And leftover carrots, peas or beans will improve it. Season to taste with salt, pepper, a spoonful of sugar, a dash or two of vinegar, and a dab of mayonnaise for binding.

If you served baked ham on Sunday and there's only a small end remaining, you can stretch it to four generous servings, guaranteed to satisfy. Try this with less than a pound of ham.

Scrub and cube three medium potatoes and four carrots. Slice two onions and about a cup of celery pieces. Boil all together in a small quantity of water about 15 minutes. Add a medium green pepper, sliced, during the last three or four minutes of cooking.

Make a sauce of 5 tablespoons melted butter, 5 tablespoons flour, 2 cups milk and half a cup light cream. Add a pinch of salt, a dash of pepper, and cook, stirring constantly, until thickened.

Cube what's left of the ham; between one and two cups is ample. Toss it into a buttered casserole. Drain the vegetables and add to ham.

(If the ham had a bone, save it for making pea soup. Save the vegetable water for soup, too. It contains precious nutrients.)

Pour the sauce over all, mix gently, sprinkle amply with breadcrumbs, dot with butter and bake 40 minutes in a 350° oven. Serve with shredded cabbage slaw, lima beans, spinach, or green peas. Fruit makes an ideal dessert.

A favorite weekend meal is roast beef; usually there's enough for a second meal, sliced cold, before making stew. If you don't know how to make stew, here's one way. Pare from the meat all the fat you can, heat to sizzling in a heavy sauce pan. Let the fat cook til crisp but not burned. If you've more than a couple of tablespoonsful of liquid fat in the pan, pour the rest off.

In the hot fat fry a diced onion til golden. Meanwhile cut the meat into pieces about 1" x 2", removing as much fat and gristle as possible. Scrape the onions to one side and add the

meat; brown thoroughly on all sides. Then pour in just enough boiling water to cover meat, toss in a bay leaf, cover closely and simmer an hour or so until fork tender.

Your stew is ready except for cooking vegetables and thickening the gravy. If you already have leftover gravy, pour off and save the stock the meat cooked in. That's the soup base you saved the vegetable juices for. Reheat the gravy and meat. If you don't have any gravy, make it from some of the stock.

Making good gravy is tricky. The most successful method, for me, is to mix two tablespoons of cornstarch in a quarter cup of warm water, add to about two cups of boiling meat juices, and stir until thickened.

Taste it. Add salt, pepper and a smidgeon of dry mustard, if needed. If it looks pale, use a commercial liquid gravy browner to darken it. This usually makes enough for one meal.

Some people boil their stew vegetables in the meat juices, but I prefer to cook mine separately and add them to meat and gravy just before serving. Try it both ways to see which your family likes best.

Pork leftovers make good chop suey; pie is a good way to use up chicken pieces; lamb stew is even better than beef; and leftover casseroles taste super the second time.

Most leftover green vegetables improve casseroles and soups, and most leftover yellow vegetables can be reheated in a baking dish. Mashed potatoes? Mix with a beaten egg, form cakes, and fry in bacon fat. Good, too, mixed in equal proportions with mashed turnip, topped with buttered bread-crumbs and baked 'til hot all through.

If you're throwing away food, you're throwing out dollars and cents. You can't afford it. Planning your meals and marketing to include leftover favorites makes your menus more varied and your purse fatter.

Leftovers don't have to taste yucky. Some of your economies could well become company specialties, to serve with pride and confidence.