



## DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART  
FLESHMAN

## A front row seat for the big dig

A loud boom awoke me at 7 a.m. and gave me a front row seat at a ditch digging, the main event of the day — that of the laying of a water pipe across 12th Street right outside my front window.

From my easy chair and in speaking outside with the job foreman, Chris, I learned about this particular job.

There were two houses to be built at the far end of the dirt road that abutted our main artery street so the approximately 180-foot waterline had to be connected with the main line running down 12th Street, and this was the morning chosen to install it.

I was surprised not to have been notified about the activity to begin just outside my door this particular day but since I hadn't planned to go elsewhere I just drew up a comfortable chair and watched the proceedings.

The noise that had brought my eyes open with a start came from the red-and-white mini-monster as it cracked the paving on the street and then scooped the dirt into the nearby truck.

We have all laughed at the question "How many workers does it take to dig a hole?" and the answer "Five. One to dig the hole and four to stand around looking in." This, of course, at the expense of the worker, but each occupation has its own critics and jesters while the workers bear up under it because they know it is just a joke.

Oddly enough, that was the scene before me when I with bleary eyes looked out the window to find the source of the big noise that had awakened me

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## BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

## Get your grass ready for winter

Mowing your lawn for the last time should be a feeling of great relief for you, but don't get too excited and cut it short to look great. The longer your grass takes to grow back, the less often you have to mow, right? Actually, you're inciting a world of trouble with that philosophy.

First of all, you're weakening the grass plants with extreme mowing — making them vulnerable to pests and disease. For the optimum health of the grass, never cut off more than one-third of its height. Otherwise, you will inhibit its full blade and root development. Furthermore, longer grass can more easily crowd out the weeds that are vying for the same sun, nutrients, and moisture.

The ideal height for grass depends on what variety of turf you have, but in general, 2 to 3 inches is a good height for most lawn grasses. When grasses are growing actively, aim for no more than 2 inches. In shade, drought, or other stressful conditions, go higher. If your lawn is planted with native grasses such as buffalo grass, mow even higher — 3 to 4 inches. Never mow your lawn shorter than 2 inches.

Mow often during mowing season, whether or not your lawn appears to need it (every 5 to 6 days). The longer you let your lawn go uncut, the easier it is for weeds to creep in. Consistent mowing is 80 percent of the job.

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## Turning Leftovers Into Tasty Meals



Ellen M. Banner / The Seattle Times-TNS

A breakfast strata, made with eggs, cheese, bread, green onions, rosemary and other ingredients, makes great use of leftover bread and other items.

# WAR ON WASTE

■ The average household wastes an estimated \$1,500 or more each year on wasted food, but there are ways to make tasty meals from items you might be used to throwing out

By **Bethany Jean Clement**  
The Seattle Times

In case you're unaware, food waste is a problem, and that's a hot new topic. The James Beard Foundation just released the book "Waste Not: How to Make the Most of Your Food," with celebrity chef/activist Tom Colicchio on board; in the introduction, he points out that, "Forty percent of all the food produced in the U.S. gets thrown away in a nation where one in six people go hungry." When it comes to groceries, people of means in the United States overbuy, stuff their fridges full, eat some of it — and then, lo and behold, the rest gets old, and into the bin it goes.

No, the food we stop wasting won't go directly to feed those in need. But the environmental footprint of such waste, taken altogether, is huge: Think of the water and energy to grow and process it, the transport, the packaging, etc. And there's the cost: an estimated \$1,500-plus per household of wasted food annually. Grandmas would be aghast.

Yes, we do have bigger problems, and figuring out how to eat every stem isn't going to save the world. But simple adjustments to how we shop and store food — and how we think about cooking and planning what we eat — can make a difference. Tasty stuff can be made with a ton of what gets thrown away, with concomitant money saved (along with trips to the store, and packaging, and ...).

Chefs know all about avoiding food waste — their profits depend on it. When I wrote about vichyssoise this past summer, Seattle restaurant heroes had excellent ideas for what to do with leftover leek tops — they stir-fry beautifully, chef Jerry Traunfeld (Poppy, Lionhead) said, while Tamara Murphy (Terra Plata) advocated for charring them with onion, peppers, garlic and whatever else to blend up into a salsa verde. In "Waste Not," chefs from all around the country — including Seattle's own Maria

Hines (Tilth, Agrodolce) — share their recipes for maximally capitalizing on everything you buy.

Getting comfortable enough with cooking to mess with recipes and experiment on your own really, really helps. The day I used an orange instead of watermelon in a summery tomato, cucumber and feta salad, I felt like a genius; I've never once since made it the "real" way (who has a watermelon lying around?). Switching kinds of onions or using a little garlic instead of a whole shallot isn't going to ruin anything, since alliums are all friends — and then you're working with what you've got, seeing how food can fit together in different ways.

Simpler still, recognizing food as food, in its entirety, is a tremendous step. Sauteing radish greens (just with olive oil, salt, pepper, a little nice vinegar) instead of throwing them away will make your day. (I did that after having them that way — treated simply and lovingly — at Sitka & Spruce.) A broccoli stem, when you think about it, is made of more broccoli: Just trim off the bottom, cut it into stick-shapes and steam it with the florets — any leaves can come along, too. (Hines' "Waste Not" recipe for Charred Broccoli Stems with Anchovy Vinaigrette sounds even better.)

Seattle food writer (and occasional Seattle Times contributor) Jill Lightner knows all the tips like this, and her brand-new book "Scraps, Peels, and Stems: Recipes and Tips for Rethinking Food Waste at Home" is stuffed full of them. If you've got the will to reduce how much you waste, she's got all the ways — and while she admits that she got obsessive about her research, weighing her scraps every day, she doesn't want to guilt-trip anyone. Her tone is that of a smart friend who happens to be an expert, but who'd never make you feel dumb for not being one. Little things do count, she says, and doing the right thing in small ways can make an

out-of-control world a little more tenable.

Among Lightner's favorite easy pointers is to get the most out of your ingredients (a grandma-approved one, for sure). A rotisserie or roasted chicken makes a dinner, then burritos, then chicken stock; the oil from sun-dried tomatoes or peppers goes great on scrambled eggs, salad or sandwiches. These "second uses," she points out, also give you ways to experiment with your cooking.

And, Lightner encourages, "When it comes to, 'Uh oh; can I still eat this?' — trust your senses, not the date on the package." Baby formula's the only food legally required to have a date stamp, she says, and the rest are not set in stone. Food-poisoning bacteria is different from food spoilage, and the latter is visible ("salad that's turned to sludge" or pungent (spoiled milk). If you're the kind of person who trims mold off cheese and eats what's still good, this'll make perfect sense to you. If not, I've done it a million times and never gotten sick. Come be weird with me!

Speaking of that, as a food writer, I end up with plenty of leftovers, and my makeshift creation known as Sandwich Casserole (born of a lot of Paseo and Un Bien in the fridge) made it into Lightner's book (page 223, in case you want to see). She's got lots of her own recipes, too, and one of her favorites is Savory French Toast with Fried Eggs, for a dinner-y take on the classic. She says she ends up with leftover bread quite a bit and usually has eggs on hand — I do too, and here's my own recipe for that, plus cheese (I can't stop buying cheese), plus whatever else you have lying around. It's a brunch casserole called strata, and it gets big and puffy and browned, and it makes a splendid dinner, too.

### STRATA

Serves 3 or 4

Use any melting-friendly cheeses you've got — the more the merrier; cheddar, jack, mozzarella and Gruyere all work great in strata. For your extras, more is more, too; the last one I made had green onion, prosciutto and lots of rosemary, and it came out fantastic (and I don't even especially love rosemary). And you can sub half-and-half for the milk and cream. If you have leftovers, they reheat perfectly: Just pour a little half-and-half, cream, milk or stock over them to revive, then bake covered for 20 minutes at 375 degrees, or microwave.

**About 6 to 8 slices of bread (about 6 cups cubed)**  
5 eggs  
1¼ cups whole milk  
1¼ cups whipping cream  
1 teaspoon salt  
Several dashes of hot sauce  
2 (or more!) cups grated cheese  
**A couple handfuls of extras, e.g., chopped onion (green or otherwise); mushrooms or zucchini; pieces of ham or prosciutto; bits of cooked bacon or sausage; any kind of fresh herb(s), chopped**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Butter a 2-quart or 2-liter casserole dish.
3. Cut or tear bread into about 1-inch cubes (a serrated knife works nicely).
4. In a medium bowl, mix the eggs, cream, milk, salt and hot sauce (a hand blender is quicker than a whisk).
5. Make a layer of about a third of the bread cubes in the bottom of the casserole dish, and sprinkle with about a third of the cheese and half of your extras; repeat for another layer, then top with the remaining bread cubes and cheese.
6. Pour the egg mixture into the casserole. (If you want to make it ahead, it can be refrigerated now all day or overnight before cooking.)
7. Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes; let rest about 10 minutes before serving.