

The Porch Swing Collective



*Making sustainable living feel like home.*

# *Feeding Hope: Making Meals from Food Bank Boxes and Tight Budgets*

## **Workbook**



# *Letter from Amber*

Dear Friends,

I made this workbook because I know what it feels like to stand in your kitchen and wonder how to make what you have stretch just a little further. I know what it's like to feel the knot in your stomach when you're doing your best, and it still doesn't feel like enough.

There were times in my life when food came from the food bank or the Salvation Army, when I skipped meals so someone else could eat, and when asking for help felt heavier than the hunger itself. If that's where you are right now — or if you've ever been there — please know this: it's not your fault. The systems are broken, not you.

I believe deeply that everyone deserves good food, dignity, and hope.

That's why I created Feeding Hope — to share what I've learned about making the most of what's available, finding small comforts, and building confidence in the kitchen again.

These pages are full of practical tools — real things you can use right away. But more than that, I hope they remind you that every small act of care counts.

Every meal you make, every bit you save, every creative thing you try — those are quiet, powerful ways of saying we're still here, and we still care.

So take what's useful, leave what's not, and let this be a gentle companion as you feed your family and yourself.

You're doing better than you think.

With warmth,

*Amber*

*The Porch Swing Collective*

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# Section 1: Foundations of Hope & Food Security

# Understanding Food Insecurity

## What Food Insecurity Really Means

Food insecurity doesn't just mean running out of food. It means worrying about how you'll feed your family next week. It means choosing between groceries and bills, or skipping your own meals so others can eat.

If you've ever faced that, you're not alone. In the United States, over 44 million people experience food insecurity each year — and that includes working parents, students, veterans, and elders. It's not rare. It's not shameful. It's the result of systems that leave people behind.

Food insecurity doesn't define who you are. It's something happening to you, not because of you.

## Why This Matters

When we understand that hunger and scarcity are systemic problems, not personal failures, we can let go of shame and start focusing on solutions.

That's where hope begins — in small acts of care, shared knowledge, and community support.

## *Food Insecurity Is More Common Than You Think*

Group	% Affected
U.S. households overall	~12%
Households with children	~17%
Single mothers	~30%
Rural areas	often higher

**Data sources: USDA & Feeding America, 2024. Exact numbers vary by region, but the reality is the same — far too many people face this.**







# Hope Is a Skill

## What Hope Really Is

Hope isn't pretending things are fine. Hope is deciding that you still matter — and acting like it, even when life feels unstable.

Hope grows when we focus on what's possible today. It might be cooking one nourishing meal, planting a seed, or learning a new skill. It's not about ignoring pain; it's about refusing to stay stuck there.

## Hope as a Practice

Every time you learn something new, feed yourself with care, or share knowledge with someone else, you're practicing hope. Like any skill, the more you practice, the stronger it becomes.

Small actions create momentum — and momentum builds confidence.

That's how change begins: one hopeful act at a time.



## Practice Hope

Choose one small act that feels possible this week.

- Cook or share a meal.
- Write a gratitude note to yourself or someone else.
- Learn one new skill from this workbook.
- Ask for help (or offer it).
- Rest. You're allowed to.

Write what you'll try this week:

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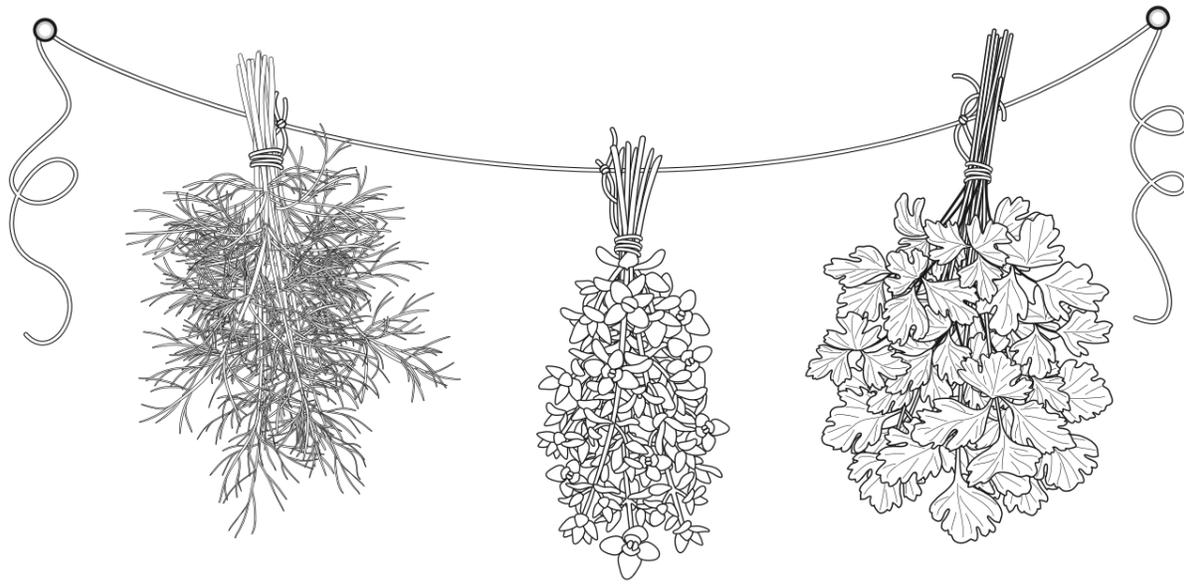
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**Stretch What You Have & Waste Less**

# Smart Storage Basics

## Why Food Storage Matters

Food waste is money waste — and most of it happens at home. Learning to store food safely helps you stretch every dollar, protect your health, and avoid that guilt we all feel when something goes bad before we use it.

You don't need special equipment to do it right — just a few simple habits.

### Temperature and Time

- Keep your fridge at 40°F or below and freezer at 0°F.
- Foods left at room temperature for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if it's hot) should be thrown out.
- Cool leftovers before sealing — warmth creates condensation and shortens storage life.



### Storage Basics That Make a Big Difference

- Store fruits and veggies separately. Some release ethylene gas that speeds ripening.
- Keep onions and potatoes in a cool, dark, ventilated space — not the fridge.
- Don't wash produce until you're ready to use it (moisture = mold).
- Label and date leftovers or frozen items. Rotate oldest to the front ("first in, first out").

## Quick Reference Guide



Food Type	Fridge Life	Freezer Life	Tips
Cooked grains, beans	4–5 days	2–3 months	Cool before storing; freeze flat in bags
Soups & stews	3–4 days	2–3 months	Leave 1 inch headspace for freezing
Cooked meat	3–4 days	2–3 months	Slice or shred before freezing for quick use
Fresh herbs	5–7 days	6 months (chopped, in oil)	Wrap in damp paper towel; freeze in cubes
Leafy greens	3–5 days	8–12 months (blanched)	Store dry with paper towel in container
Milk	5–7 days	1 month	Shake after thawing; texture may change

# Putting It Into Practice

## Try This

This week, choose one thing to store differently — maybe freezing leftover soup, wrapping herbs, or keeping a “use first” bin in the fridge.

Write what you’ll try:

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# “Still Good?” — How to Spot Spoilage

## Learning to Trust Your Senses

Food doesn't come with an exact expiration date — even the printed ones can be confusing. “Best by” usually means quality, not safety. “Use by” and “sell by” are about freshness, not danger. Learning to trust your eyes, nose, and instincts helps you waste less and stay safe.

## Look, Smell, Feel — The Big Three:

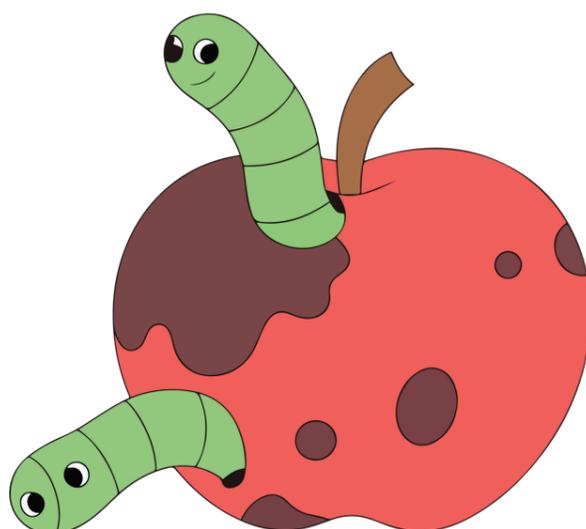
- Look: Does it have mold, discoloration, or unusual liquid separation?
  - Smell: Does it smell sour, rancid, or “off”? (When in doubt, toss it out.)
  - Feel: Has it turned slimy, sticky, or unusually soft?
- If any two of these seem wrong — don't risk it.

## Understanding Food Dates

- Best By / Sell By: About quality. It's often fine afterward.
- Use By / Expires On: More important for high-risk foods (meat, dairy, baby formula).
- Freezer Burn: Not dangerous — just affects texture and taste. Cut away icy areas and cook normally.

## When to Be Extra Careful:

- Leftovers more than 4 days old.
- Perishable food left out for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour if over 90°F).
- Dented, bulging, or leaking cans — these may indicate botulism risk.
- Anything with a strange odor or fizzing sound that shouldn't be there.



# Quick Reference Chart

Food Type	Fridge Life	Check For...	Notes
Cooked grains & beans	4-5 days	Sour smell, sticky film	Safe to freeze if unsure
Cooked meat & poultry	3-4 days	Slimy texture, gray color	Reheat to 165°F
Soups & stews	3-4 days	Sour smell, bubbles, thick film	Freeze extras early
Dairy (milk, yogurt)	5-7 days	Sour smell, curdling	Trust your nose first
Leafy greens	3-5 days	Slimy, dark patches	Wash, dry well before storage
Eggs (uncooked)	3-5 weeks	Floating in water = bad	Hard-boiled: 1 week
Bread	5-7 days	Mold or off smell	Freeze slices before mold sets

## Try This:

Write down 3 foods you often throw out because you're unsure if they're still good. Research or track how long they actually last next time — you may be surprised!

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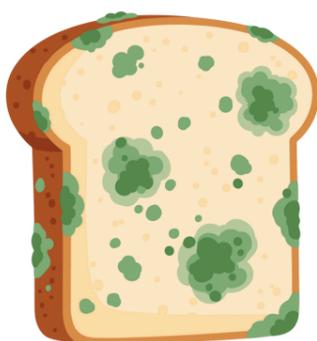
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# Save It for Broth

## Why Broth Matters

Broth is one of the easiest and most satisfying ways to stretch food and reduce waste. Every time you save scraps, you're turning "trash" into nourishment.

You don't need anything fancy — just water, heat, and time.

### How to Build a Scrap Bag

Keep a large freezer bag or container labeled

"Broth Scraps." Each time you cook, toss in:

Vegetable ends and peels (carrots, celery, onions, garlic)

Herb stems (parsley, thyme, cilantro)

Mushroom stems, green onion tops, corn cobs

Bones, shells, or meat trimmings (if you eat meat)

When the bag is full, it's time to make broth.

### Simple Method:

1. Add scraps to a large pot and cover with water.
2. Simmer for 1–3 hours (or longer in a slow cooker).
3. Strain through a fine sieve or cheesecloth.
4. Cool completely before freezing or refrigerating.

Add salt, pepper, or herbs after straining — not before — so you can season it fresh each time you use it.

### Basic Broth Ratio

- About 2 lbs of scraps to 1 gallon of water
- Simmer 2–3 hours (vegetable) or 4–6 hours (bone-based)
- Cool completely before freezing
- Store in fridge up to 5 days or freezer up to 3 months

Tip: Freeze broth in silicone muffin cups or jars with headspace so you can pop out single portions later.



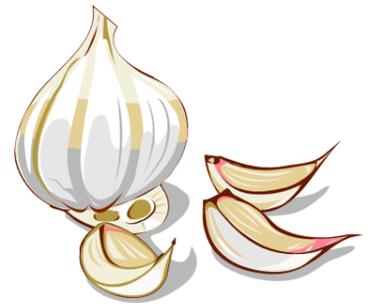
# What to Save (and What to Skip)

## Best Scraps for Broth

Use these often — they add depth, color, and nutrition.

- Onion skins and ends (yellow or white)
- Carrot peels and tips
- Celery tops and leaves
- Garlic ends and skins
- Mushroom stems
- Leek and green onion tops
- Corn cobs
- Parsley, thyme, or dill stems
- Tomato ends or a few slices for sweetness
- Chicken or turkey bones
- Shrimp shells or fish bones (for seafood broth)

💡 Tip: Keep vegetable scraps and meat scraps in separate freezer bags so you can choose veggie or bone broth later.\*



## Skip These or Use Very Lightly

These can make broth bitter, greasy, or cloudy.

- Red onion skins (can turn broth purple)
- Beets or beet greens (make broth earthy and red)
- Potatoes or sweet potatoes (too starchy)
- Broccoli, cabbage, or cauliflower (adds a sulfur smell)
- Very oily, salty, or fried scraps
- Citrus peels
- Moldy or slimy produce

🍲 If you wouldn't eat it, don't save it for broth.



# Love Your Leftovers

## Why Leftovers Matter

Leftovers save time, money, and energy — all things that are in short supply when life feels overwhelming. But they're also an act of care. Using what you already have honors the effort, money, and love that went into making that meal.

## Safety Reminder:

- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.
- Eat within 3–4 days or freeze for later.
- Always reheat to at least 165°F.

## The Trick Is to Reimagine, Not Repeat

You don't have to eat the same thing twice — you just need to change the form.

Leftover rice becomes stir-fry, soup, or fried rice cakes.

Mashed potatoes become shepherd's pie topping or potato pancakes.

Roasted veggies turn into omelets, grain bowls, or pureed soups.

Stale bread can be croutons, breadcrumbs, or French toast.

When you see leftovers as ingredients instead of repeats, you open up endless options.



# Leftovers → New Meals

What You Have	What You Can Make
Cooked pasta	Pasta bake, soup, or cold salad
Cooked meat	Tacos, fried rice, sandwiches, or wraps
Rice or grains	Soup thickener, stir-fry, or veggie bowls
Veggies	Egg scramble, soup, burritos, or roasted hash
Beans or lentils	Chili, soup, or veggie burgers
Bread	Bread pudding, stuffing, or breadcrumbs

### Try This:

Look in your fridge today and choose one leftover item.  
What could it become with a few small additions?



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# Freezer = Friend

## Why the Freezer Matters

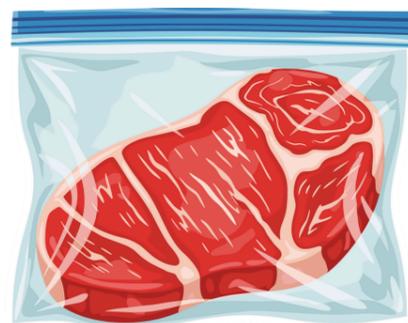
Your freezer is one of the most powerful tools you already own.

It's not just for ice cream and leftovers — it's a savings account for food.

Every time you freeze something instead of tossing it, you're giving yourself future time, energy, and meals.

## Tips for Freezer Success

- Cool food completely first. Warm food causes condensation and freezer burn.
- Use flat bags or containers. They save space and thaw faster.
- Label and date everything. Even a simple Sharpie note works.
- Keep “ready to heat” meals near the front. You'll use them more often.
- Rotate often. Move older items forward (“first in, first out”).



## Preventing Freezer Burn

- Squeeze as much air as possible from bags.
- Use reusable silicone bags or wrap items tightly in plastic + foil.
- Leave ½–1 inch of headspace in jars to prevent cracking.
- Freeze in portions — smaller packs thaw faster and reduce waste.



# What Freezes Well



<b>Grains &amp; Legumes</b>	Cooked rice, beans, lentils	Quinoa can get mushy if overcooked
<b>Veggies</b>	Blanched greens, roasted root veg, peas, corn, bell peppers	Raw potatoes and lettuce — poor texture
<b>Fruits</b>	Berries, chopped bananas, peaches (for smoothies or baking)	Citrus slices and melons (get watery)
<b>Proteins</b>	Cooked meats, shredded poultry, cooked fish	Raw eggs in shells, mayo-based dishes
<b>Dairy</b>	Shredded cheese, milk (for cooking), yogurt (for smoothies)	Cream sauces, sour cream — texture changes
<b>Soups &amp; Stews</b>	Broth-based soups, chili, veggie or bean stews	Creamy soups may separate — stir when reheating
<b>Bread &amp; Baked Goods</b>	Sliced bread, muffins, cookies, pie dough	Frosted cakes — frost after thawing

## Try This:

Choose one item to freeze this week instead of throwing it out — a portion of soup, cooked rice, or extra bread.

Write what you saved and how it worked when you thawed it:

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# Pantry Staples & Balanced Meals

# The 3 + 1 Formula

*A simple way to build a complete meal.*

## Why the 3 + 1 Formula Works

Most nutritious, satisfying meals have the same simple structure:  
a protein + a carb + a vegetable or fruit + a flavor/fat.

When you think in combinations instead of recipes, you can create endless meals with what you already have.

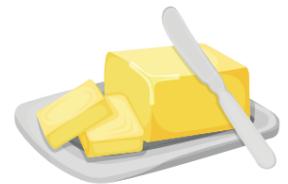
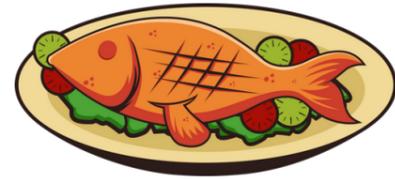
### The 3 + 1 Formula:

 **Protein** — beans, lentils, eggs, fish, tofu, meat, nuts

 **Carb** — rice, pasta, bread, potatoes, oats, tortillas

 **Vegetable or Fruit** — fresh, frozen, or canned — all count

 **Flavor/Fat** — oil, butter, herbs, vinegar, cheese, sauce, spices



This mix gives your body energy, protein, and satisfaction —  
and your meals flavor and balance.

 <b>Protein</b>	 <b>Carb</b>	 <b>Veg/Fruit</b>	 <b>Flavor/Fat</b>
Beans	Rice	Peppers & onion	Olive oil + herbs
Tuna	Pasta	Spinach	Lemon juice + mayo
Eggs	Toast	Tomato	Cheese or avocado
Chicken	Potato	Broccoli	Butter + garlic
Lentils	Flatbread	Carrots	Curry spice + coconut milk



# Cheap Meal Ideas

Meal	3 + 1 Breakdown
Veggie fried rice	Egg + Rice + Mixed veggies + Oil & soy sauce
Pasta skillet	Lentils + Pasta + Tomato + Olive oil & garlic
Potato bowl	Chicken + Potato + Broccoli + Butter
Oatmeal bowl	Peanut butter + Oats + Banana + Honey
Soup starter	Beans + Rice + Canned tomato + Herbs & oil
Bean & Rice Burrito Bowl	Beans + Rice + Corn/tomato + Oil, taco seasoning, or cheese
Tuna Noodle Bake	Tuna + Pasta + Peas + Cream soup or mayo + breadcrumbs
Shepherd's Pie	Ground turkey or beef + Mashed potatoes + Mixed veggies + Butter & salt
Quick Curry	Chickpeas + Rice + Canned tomato or spinach + Curry powder + oil
Stuffed Peppers or Cabbage Wraps	Ground meat or beans + Rice + Peppers/cabbage + Tomato sauce
Loaded Baked Potato	Potato + Beans or shredded meat + Corn/onion + Butter or cheese
Simple Stir-Fry	Chicken or tofu + Rice or noodles + Broccoli + Soy sauce & oil
Veggie Quesadilla	Beans + Tortilla + Veggies or corn + Oil & shredded cheese
Egg Drop Ramen	Eggs + Instant noodles + Spinach or carrots + Soy sauce & sesame oil
Simple Rice Casserole	Chicken or beans + Rice + Canned soup + Frozen veggies
Apple Crisp Dessert	Oats + Apples + Sugar & cinnamon + Butter
Sweet Potato Hash	Sweet potatoes + Beans or eggs + Peppers/onions + Olive oil

# Real-World 3 + 1 Examples

## From the Food Bank Box

- Protein: canned beans, tuna, or peanut butter
- Carb: rice, pasta, or oatmeal
- Veg/Fruit: canned corn, peas, mixed veggies, or fruit cups
- Flavor/Fat: oil from a donated bottle, a spoon of mayo, a sprinkle of salt or herbs

*Example: Cook rice + stir in drained beans + add corn + drizzle with oil and taco seasoning packet → quick burrito bowl.*

## From the Discount Shelf

- Protein: chicken thighs, pork shoulder, or ground turkey — all cheaper cuts that stay juicy
- Carb: potatoes, day-old bread, or bulk pasta
- Veg/Fruit: frozen broccoli, carrots, or spinach — low waste and often cheaper
- Flavor/Fat: olive oil, canola oil, or butter

*Example: Roast chicken thighs + toss frozen veggies on the same pan + serve over potatoes.*

## Healthy, Budget-Friendly Oils & Fats

- Olive oil: for roasting or drizzling
- Canola or sunflower oil: neutral flavor, low cost
- Butter or margarine: great for flavor and comfort foods
- Peanut butter: adds protein and fat — whisk with soy sauce for an easy noodle sauce

### Try This:

Pick one meal idea using the 3 + 1 Formula from your pantry right now.

What did you come up with?

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# Ten Core Staples That Work Hard

## Rice (and Other Grains)

- The backbone of budget cooking — pairs with almost everything.
- Use for soups, casseroles, stir-fries, burrito bowls, or breakfast porridge.
- Try: white rice, brown rice, barley, oats, or quinoa (if tolerated).

## Beans & Lentils

- Protein-packed, shelf-stable, and endlessly adaptable.
- Use for soups, chili, tacos, salads, or pureed dips.
- Try: black beans, pinto, chickpeas, lentils — canned or dry.

## Pasta

- Cheap, filling, and forgiving.
- Great base for sauces, soups, and one-pot meals.
- Try: macaroni, shells, spaghetti, or egg noodles.

## Canned or Frozen Vegetables

- Just as nutritious as fresh — sometimes more!
- Use to bulk up soups, casseroles, or stir-fries.
- Try: corn, peas, carrots, green beans, spinach, or mixed veggies.

## Canned Tomatoes

- Adds flavor, acid, and richness to nearly everything.
- Use for sauces, soups, stews, and casseroles.
- Try: diced, crushed, sauce, or paste.

## Eggs (or Egg Alternatives)

- One of the cheapest complete proteins.
- Use for scrambles, baking, fried rice, or veggie fritters.
- If eggs aren't available: use lentils, beans, or tofu instead.

## Potatoes (White or Sweet)

- Affordable, filling, and versatile.
- Roast, mash, fry, or use as soup thickener.
- Store in a cool, dark place — they last weeks.

## Canned Fish or Poultry

- Shelf-stable, high in protein, and great for quick meals.
- Use for salads, pasta, sandwiches, or rice bowls.
- Try: tuna, salmon, or canned chicken.

## Oil or Fat Source

- Adds calories, flavor, and helps absorb nutrients.
- Try: olive, canola, or sunflower oil; butter or margarine if available.
- Even a little goes a long way.

## Flavor Builders

These small ingredients turn basic staples into meals.

Try: garlic, onions, salt, pepper, vinegar, soy sauce, herbs, or bouillon cubes.

Keep them visible — you'll use them more often.



# Getting the Most from Simple Foods

## Making “Simple” Feel Special

You don't need fancy ingredients to make good food — you just need a few tricks. With a handful of pantry staples and some care, you can turn basic food into something comforting, nourishing, and satisfying.

## Flavor & Texture Tricks

### Build Flavor:

- Toast your grains or pasta before adding water — it brings out nutty depth.
- Sauté onions or garlic before adding other ingredients — instant richness.
- Add acid (lemon, vinegar, tomato) at the end to brighten flavors.
- Layer salt and spice — a pinch early, a little more at the end.
- Finish with fat — a drizzle of oil, a pat of butter, or a spoon of peanut butter makes meals feel complete.



### Add Texture:

- Combine crunchy + soft (nuts on oatmeal, breadcrumbs on casseroles).
- Mash beans or veggies into soups to make them creamy without dairy.
- Roast instead of boil when you can — it caramelizes and sweetens.

## Stretch Nutrition Without Stretching the Budget:

- Add beans or lentils to soups, pasta, or casseroles — more protein, less cost.
- Mix frozen or canned veggies into rice, ramen, or scrambled eggs.
- Use oats or rice as fillers in meat dishes to make them go farther.
- Stir greens (fresh or frozen) into soups or eggs for vitamins and fiber.
- Add a spoonful of oil or butter to meals — it helps your body absorb nutrients and stay full longer.



# Batch Cooking

## Why Batch Cooking Works

Cooking in batches doesn't mean eating the same meal all week — it means preparing components you can mix and match later.

It saves:

- Money — buying or cooking in bulk is cheaper.
- Time — fewer dishes, less cleanup.
- Energy — fewer decisions during the week.

Think of it as building blocks for your week — rice, beans, roasted veggies, sauces, or cooked meat — that you can use to assemble fast meals later.

## How to Start Small

- Choose one food to batch-cook this week (like rice, soup, or roasted veggies).
- Store in single-meal containers or freezer bags labeled with the date.
- Mix it into new meals during the week so nothing gets wasted.

Example: Cook 3 cups of rice → serve with beans one night, stir-fry another, soup the next.

## Smart Storage Tips

### Fridge: 40°F or below

- Store cooked food up to 4 days.
- Use clear containers so you can see what you have.
- Keep “use first” bins for older items.

### Freezer: 0°F

- Label and date everything.
- Freeze flat to save space and thaw quickly.
- Leave space at the top of jars for expansion.

### Pantry: cool, dry, dark

- Store grains, beans, and flour in sealed containers.
- Keep a small scoop or measuring cup inside for easy use.



# One Batch, Three Meals

Batch Cooked	Meal 1	Meal 2	Meal 3
Lentils	Lentil soup	Tacos with lentils & rice	Shepherd's pie filling
Rice	Rice & beans	Fried rice with veggies	Add to soup or burritos
Roasted chicken	Chicken & potatoes	Chicken noodle soup	Chicken salad sandwiches
Roasted veggies	Grain bowl	Omelet	Pureed soup
Tomato sauce	Pasta night	Chili	Soup base

## Try This:

Choose one food you could batch-cook this week.

What will you make with it?

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# Storage & Food Safety

## Why Food Safety Matters

Food safety is about avoiding the common mistakes that cause food to spoil early or make people sick.

A few small habits protect your food and your health.

### The Basics:



- **Temperature:**
  - Keep fridge at 40°F (4°C) or lower.
  - Freezer at 0°F (-18°C).
- **Storage Order:**
  - Store cooked food above raw food in the fridge to prevent drips.
  - Cool hot foods within 2 hours before refrigerating or freezing.
- **Containers:**
  - Use airtight containers, glass jars, or bags designed for food storage.
  - Avoid reusing takeout containers that aren't microwave-safe.
- **Labeling:**
  - Label everything with what it is and when it was cooked or frozen.

Tip: A strip of masking tape and a marker can save you money and confusion later.

### Try This:

Choose one small food safety habit to start this week — labeling leftovers, cooling food faster, or reorganizing your fridge.

Write it here:

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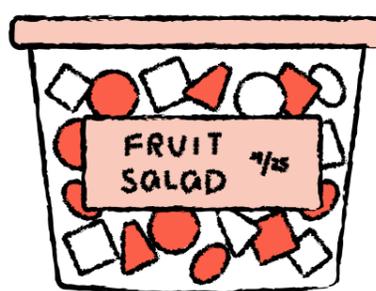
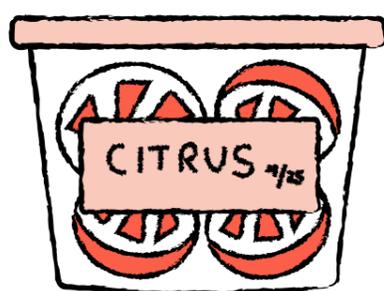
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# Quick Reference Storage Timelines

Food Type	Fridge (40°F)	Freezer (0°F)
Cooked meat or poultry	3–4 days	2–3 months
Cooked beans or lentils	4–5 days	2–3 months
Soups & stews	3–4 days	2–3 months
Rice & cooked grains	4–5 days	2 months
Cooked veggies	3–4 days	2–3 months
Leftovers (mixed meals)	3–4 days	2–3 months
Baked goods (bread, muffins)	3–5 days	2–3 months
Broth	4–5 days	2–3 months
Eggs (boiled)	1 week	Not recommended (texture change)



# Preserving Without Fancy Equipment

## Why Preserving Matters

Sometimes we get a big food bank haul or buy in bulk when things are on sale — then the question is how to make it all last.

You don't need fancy tools. You just need creativity, clean containers, and a bit of time. Preserving is an act of care — it saves food, stretches budgets, and builds security for days when things feel uncertain.

## Four Easy Ways to Preserve Without Special Tools

### Freezing

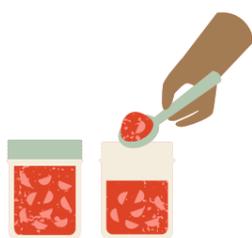
- Cool food completely before freezing.
- Store in meal-sized portions using jars, freezer bags, or silicone trays.
- Freeze fruit slices, cooked beans, rice, or soup flat for space saving.

Most cooked foods last 2–3 months in the freezer.

### Oven or Air-Drying

- Dry herbs, citrus peels, or thin fruit slices at the lowest oven setting with the door cracked open.
- Place on a lined baking sheet or cooling rack.
- Once crisp, store in a dry jar or bag.

Dried herbs and fruit can last for months if kept dry.



### Quick Fridge Pickles

- Use a clean jar, add sliced veggies (cucumber, onion, carrots, peppers).
- Boil equal parts vinegar and water; add salt, sugar, and spices if you have them.
- Pour over veggies, cool, then refrigerate.
- Great for topping sandwiches or adding flavor to rice bowls.

Keeps about 2 weeks in the fridge.

### Sweet or Savory Syrups & Sauces

- Simmer excess fruit with a bit of sugar and lemon (or vinegar for savory).
- Reduce until thick and store in a jar in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.
- Use as pancake syrup, drizzle on yogurt, or glaze meats.

You can freeze extras for longer storage.



## Safety & Storage Tips

- Always start with clean jars and utensils.
- Label and date everything.
- Store pickled or syrup items in the fridge, not on the shelf.
- Check for spoilage before using: mold, fizzing, or off smell = toss it.
- When in doubt, don't risk it.



# Stretching Your Grocery Dollars

# Shopping Smart (Even on a Tight Budget or Food Bank Box)

## It's Not About Buying More — It's About Buying Better

Every dollar and every item matters when money is tight. Smart shopping means planning a little, paying attention to unit prices, and choosing foods that can do double or triple duty in your meals.

### Simple Strategies That Stretch Your Budget

1. Shop from your own pantry first.
  2. Check what you already have before buying duplicates.
  3. Plan flexible meals, not rigid recipes.
  4. Base your shopping list on what's on sale or what you get from the food bank.
  5. Buy "ingredient" foods more than "ready" foods.
  6. Dry beans, rice, and oats stretch far further than packaged meals.
  7. Check the unit price tag.
  8. The smaller number on the shelf label shows the cost per ounce or pound — that's the real comparison.
  9. Use sales and programs wisely.
    - In Washington, EBT users often get Double Up Food Bucks — spend \$10 on produce, get \$10 free in vouchers.
    - Many grocery apps let you "clip" digital coupons even if you pay with EBT.
- 💡 Tip: Always check your receipt — errors happen, and stores will usually fix them on the spot.

### Food Bank & Donation Box Strategies

Make the Box Work for You

- Sort it right away. Keep shelf-stable items in your pantry and freeze anything perishable you can't use soon.
  - Trade what you can't use. Many communities have "free tables" or swap spots — trading is encouraged!
  - Build your meals around what you get.
  - Example:
    - Got canned corn and beans? → Make a skillet hash or soup.
    - Got pasta and canned chicken? → Quick pasta bake with herbs and oil.
    - Got fruit cups or applesauce? → Mix into oatmeal or muffins.
- 🍲 If you have more than you can use, share it — that's community in action.



### Try This:

Look at your next shopping trip or food bank box.

What's one way you could make it stretch further this week — by freezing, batching, or mixing it into multiple meals?

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# Preserving Food Bank Abundance

## Why This Matters

Sometimes food banks have a surplus — and that means you might get 12 loaves of bread, 5 dozen eggs, or 10 pounds of apples all at once.

It can feel overwhelming, but with a few simple tricks, you can make that abundance last for weeks or even months.

## How to Handle the Big Hauls

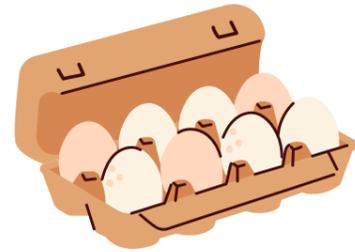
### Bread & Baked Goods

- Slice before freezing so you can grab what you need.
- Freeze flat in bags or wrap in foil — thaw on the counter or toast from frozen.
- Turn stale bread into breadcrumbs, croutons, or French toast.



### Produce

- Apples: slice and freeze for baking, cook into applesauce, or dehydrate in the oven.
- Bananas: peel, slice, and freeze for smoothies or banana bread.
- Greens: blanch for 1–2 minutes, drain, and freeze in small portions.
- Carrots, celery, onions: chop and freeze for soup starters.
- Tomatoes: simmer into sauce or chop and freeze raw in bags.



### Eggs

- Crack and lightly beat, then pour into ice cube trays or muffin tins.
- Once frozen, pop into a bag and thaw in the fridge as needed for cooking or baking.
- Use boiled eggs in potato salad, tuna salad, or quick protein snacks.

### Dairy

- Shred cheese and freeze flat in bags (it pours out easily later).
- Milk and yogurt can be frozen for cooking or smoothies — thaw in the fridge and shake well.



# Preserving Food Bank Abundance

## Real-World Example: Making It Work

“One week, our food bank had hundreds of dozens of eggs to give away. I took extra, scrambled and baked them into breakfast burritos with rice, beans, and veggies. I froze them individually — and we had ready-to-go breakfasts for a month.”

## Safety & Storage Tips

- Always cool cooked food before freezing.
- Label and date everything — even a marker on tape works.
- If something looks or smells off, compost or discard it.
- Don't refreeze food that's thawed completely unless it's been cooked again.

## Try This:

Next time you get a large amount of something, try freezing or repurposing part of it.

Write what you preserved and how it worked out:

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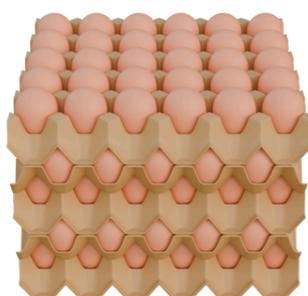
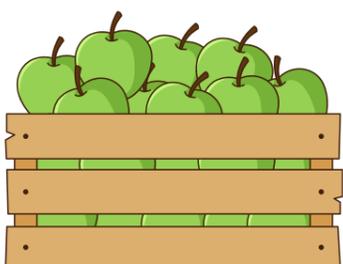
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# Community & Connection

# Community & Connection

## Why Community Matters

Food insecurity often feels isolating, but it's not an individual failure — it's a community challenge.

When we share resources, time, and knowledge, we create strength that no one person could build alone.

💛 Connection is nourishment too.

## Ways Community Builds Food Security

- **Food Banks & Pantries** — a lifeline for many families.
- Visit without shame. These places exist because we believe everyone deserves to eat.
- **Gleaning Programs** — volunteers collect extra produce from farms or gardens. You can often help and take home a share.
- **Buy Nothing Groups** — neighbors sharing extra food, clothes, or tools freely.
- **Community Gardens** — grow and harvest food together; many allow anyone to take what they need.
- **Food Co-ops or CSAs** — small local groups that share bulk food orders or seasonal produce boxes.

## When Asking for Help

- Everyone needs help sometimes. You're not a burden — you're part of a network.
- Ask for what you actually need. People want to give meaningfully.
- Remember: receiving help doesn't erase your independence — it sustains it.

## When You Have a Little Extra

- Share what you can — food, time, or knowledge.
- Offer gently: “Would you like some?” is more dignified than “You need this.”
- Small kindnesses ripple. You might be helping someone through their hardest week without even knowing it.

🌱 Community is built from mutual care, not comparison.

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# Community & Connection

## Real-World Ways to Connect

Type of Connection	Example	How It Helps
Local Gleaning Group	Join or start a neighborhood harvest share	Reduces food waste, builds relationships
Free Fridge / Pantry	Stock or borrow from community fridges	Creates mutual trust and immediate support
Buy Nothing / Freecycle	Trade surplus food or garden produce	Keeps abundance circulating locally
Meal Train	Offer or request meals during tough times	Turns care into action
Community Garden	Volunteer or plant extra for donation	Nourishes bodies and connection

### Try This:

Think of one small way you could connect with your community this month — receiving help, offering something, or just reaching out.

Write it here:

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# Thank You for Being Here

You've made it to the end of Feeding Hope.

That means you showed up — for yourself, your family, and your community. You've learned how to make food last, how to turn “random” into resourceful, and how to find dignity and connection in the act of feeding yourself and others. Whether you're cooking from a full pantry or a food bank box, you're part of something much bigger:

a movement of people who believe everyone deserves to eat, and that care — not shame — should be the foundation of every meal.

Keep these skills close.

Share them when you can.

And if you ever doubt yourself, remember — the same care you bring to feeding others is what makes the world a little better every day.

The Porch Swing Collective



*Making sustainable living feel like home.*

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