



Starting from **SCRAPS**

The way we eat is changing. So Amy Broomfield asked some of our best-loved chefs to tell us how they tackle food waste – and how we can get on board, too

Adam Handling outside
The Frog in Shoreditch

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he world is not a bowl of fruit from which we can just take what we wish,” said Sir David Attenborough on the BBC in April. “Don’t waste,” he implored. “Think this world is precious, think your time is precious, think the rest of the natural world is precious.” Powerful words as ever from the king of the natural world, but in mid-April, as the planet struggled to come to terms with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, they could not have been more perfectly timed. Everyone, everywhere, has since been questioning their consumption habits – not least in the way we buy and eat food.

In culinary circles, minimizing waste is not new. Raymond Blanc’s Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons has been in sync with the horticultural calendar since it opened 36 years ago, boasting a garden rich with homegrown produce. And the luxurious Oxfordshire hotel and restaurant composts 94 per cent of its food waste. “We work tirelessly to prove luxury and sustainability can be the most comfortable of associations,” says Blanc. “We recently invested in a Rocket composter, which can handle up to 2.5 tonnes of organic waste per week.”

Other superchefs, such as Thomas Keller and Massimo Bottura, regularly teach sustainability practices in masterclass videos – and following this year’s events, messages have been revived with renewed vigour. The foodie community has never been livelier with homespun videos on how to cook using leftovers and store-cupboard ingredients. Granted, some people have more luxurious pantries than others, but cooking with a conscience is fast becoming the endgame.

Adam Handling has also been making waves in London with his environmental approach, though the Scottish chef admits it was an ambition only lately

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realised. “Looking back, ignorance is bliss,” he says. “As a young chef, you would take a giant carrot, cut a small portion, bin the rest – whatever the cost.” And admittedly Handling’s early attempts at reducing waste at his Bean & Wheat cafe in Shoreditch were more about saving money than the planet. “At first, it was about being able to open tomorrow. I didn’t have any freezers, because I couldn’t afford them, so for a while my staff ate like kings with our leftovers. Not that I didn’t want to look after my team, but, you know...” he laughs. “Then we introduced all our takeouts in jars – bring your jar back and you got a free coffee. It was about utilising waste *and* making money.”

Early in his quest, after each day of service, Handling and his team would empty the food bins to examine what they hadn’t used and consider how they could waste less. Today, his restaurant group (he currently operates in five locations) functions on a cycle of sourcing sustainable produce and repurposing any unused foods in other venues. He even has a food lab for brining, pickling and fermenting, and a drinks lab that distils fruit peelings into spirits. Last year, he opened Ugly Butterfly, a restaurant with a zero-waste menu that uses the by-products from his signature site Adam Handling Chelsea. The project was designed to prove that sustainable foods don’t compromise fine dining, with elegant dishes of lobster-shell soup, devilled eggs, and steak tartare made from retired dairy cows. “We don’t cook with waste because it’s waste. We cook with it because it’s delicious and can be made into something,” he says. He recommends a similar approach at home: “Keep any food left over and examine it. Instagram a chef and ask what you can do with it. If you don’t ask, you’ll never learn!”

Jackson Boxer, owner and restaurateur of Orasay and Brunswick House, also works hard to make the most of fresh food. “We try to get as much value out >



10 TOP TIPS for sustainable cooking

By Alistair Birt, Head Pastry Chef, Harrods

1 Plan your meals for the week and only buy what you need. Remember to always check your cupboards before you go shopping – there is always something lurking in the back that you don't need to buy again.

2 Buy whole joints of meat that can be broken down and then saved or used in other ways – like to make broths and stocks.

3 Make the most of your freezer: cook in bulk and freeze extra portions for another day. And – importantly – devise a proper system for storing food with dates and labels.

4 Think creatively with your leftovers.

5 Don't allow any fruit to go to waste: you can make jam or compote with excess fruit, or, if you only have a small amount, freeze it and use it in your morning smoothie.

6 Try to buy foods in recyclable packaging or containers that you can reuse. Some of our Harrods teas, coffees and condiments come in keepsake tins and jars that look great on the shelf.

7 Respect the product and the producer. Think carefully about how you can get the most out of the product.

8 Dry out any leftover bread you have in a very-low-heat oven, then blend down to make breadcrumbs to either use or store.

9 Try to grow your own herbs – you rarely need a full bunch. They can grow really easily on windowsills.

10 Chocolate that's been melted but not used is fine for another day. Pour it on to baking paper on a tray, allow to set, wrap in clingfilm and keep in a cool, dry place.

of produce as possible," he says. "Scraps go into stocks and broths, or get pickled or powdered, or used to flavour oils."

Boxer spent much of his childhood in the Outer Hebrides, where meals were based on seasonality and finely tuned with nature. Those memories still resonate, so it's no wonder his restaurants have an affinity with cooking seasonally. His food is as soulful and warming as it is unpretentious, with dishes of crab claw and wild garlic; cockles, saffron and golden beetroot; and chicken in a sherry sauce. "What's great now is that people are really embracing cooking, and seeking out excellent produce from small farms and suppliers," he says. "During the pandemic, people who'd normally eat out started buying minimal groceries and shopping more consciously. I hope this heightened awareness proves lasting."

"Zero-waste culture, to some degree, is ingrained in all chefs from day one at college," says Alistair Birt, head pastry chef at Harrods. "No-one ever wants to see any waste, and we've been cleverly disguising leftovers for as long as there have been restaurants. The fact the public have become more aware has allowed chefs and food producers to really stretch their imaginations and technical ability."

Inspired by the likes of Handling and Blanc, Birt says his team have definitely incorporated more effective practices. "We endeavour to waste as little as possible, paying close attention to batch sizes and correct storage. Any waste is sent to a composting company that turns it into fertiliser. I'm the same at home – I only buy what I need and freeze for later. I recently bought a vacuum-pack machine and now everything is in sous-vide bags – it's so satisfying!"

It sounds simple enough: buy sensibly, make conscious decisions, be creative with leftovers. "I think, and hope, that the more people adapt their lives to live a 'zero-waste lifestyle', the more it will encourage others and spread the message we are hoping for," says Blanc, an early pioneer. And as Sir David concludes, "If we act now, we can put it right. Stop waste of any kind – celebrate and cherish." □

*Clockwise from top left
Fresh produce destined for Raymond Blanc's fine-dining dishes at Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons; the Oxfordshire hotel's kitchen garden; devilled eggs at Andrew Handling's Ugly Butterfly; Jackson Boxer, a big advocate of sustainable practices at his restaurants; scallops, shiitake mushrooms and vin jaune butter at Boxer's Orasay*

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