SUSTAINALANYC

# Sustainability Newsletter

FALL 2026



ALA Association of Legal Administrators | New York City Chapter




Welcome to the Fall **2026 Issue of SustainALANYC.**

Through our newsletter, we provide information on how each of us individually and as organizations is responsible for economic, social, and environmental change and what we can do to make a difference.

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**Meet the Sustainability Team**

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# The Eco-Drop
# Fall Edition

*Rose Hirsch*

**Sustainable living, from the desk to the harvest table**

The air is crisp, the leaves are turning, and cozy season is officially here. As we settle into autumn routines, it's the perfect time to refresh our habits and embrace the slower, more intentional rhythm of fall.
While many of us look forward to sweaters, warm drinks, and weekend leaf-peeping, the shift to cooler weather can take a toll on energy use, heating bills, and the planet. This month, we're exploring practical ways to stay comfortable, reduce waste, and keep things sustainable both at your desk and at home.

## 1. The Weekly Reset: Conquering the "Fall Freeze"

As temperatures drop, many offices crank up the heat, often too much. Overheating buildings increases energy consumption and creates uncomfortable temperature swings.

**The Switch:** Whether you're adjusting your thermostat at home or managing your hybrid workspace, try lowering the thermostat just 2°F (e.g., from 72°F to 70°F). Use draft stoppers, keep doors closed, and rely on layered clothing to stay comfortable.

**The Impact:** Every degree you lower the thermostat in fall saves 3% to 5% on heating costs, mirroring the cooling savings highlighted in our summer edition. Keeping a cozy "desk cardigan" nearby means you stay warm without forcing the heating system into overdrive. Pro-tip: certain natural fibers such as wool and cashmere amongst others will keep you warmer longer than synthetics.

## 2. Side-by-Side: Fall Flow

Here's how to maximize your autumn vibes while keeping your footprint light, from your **9-to-5** to your **5-to-9**:



### 3. Truth or Trash? The Fall Closet Refresh Edition

**The Myth:** "Old sweaters, worn scarves, and faded flannels belong in the trash because thrift stores won't take them."

**The Truth:** Not true! Just like summer textiles, fall clothing shouldn't go to landfills. Textile recycling drop-offs accept unwearable items and repurpose them into insulation, stuffing, or industrial rags. At Symposium this year, we collaborated with the C.O.R.E. and Symposium teams to be able to provide an opportunity to attendees to drop off their winter gear that will be collected and donated to St. Mary's Clothing Drive. You can learn more at the following link: https://givebutter.com/support-StMarys.

### 4. Life-Hack Corner: The 'Too Good to Waste' Fall Produce Trick

Autumn brings apples, squash, root vegetables and the frustration of watching them spoil before you can use them.

- **The Hack:** Create a "Use Me First" Basket in your fridge for produce or leftovers nearing expiration. Depending on the fruit or vegetables, you could also cut it up or purée for future use and then freeze it. Freezing can help extend its life.

- **The Perk:** It reduces food waste (which produces greenhouse gases in landfills) and saves households hundreds of dollars each season.

### 5. Good News Only! 🍂🐝

Here's a reason to celebrate:
Communities are continuing their efforts to protect pollinators. Many cities and campuses are planting native wildflowers like goldenrods and asters which provide crucial late-season food for bees and butterflies. These small changes support the same pollinator resurgence highlighted in our summer edition.

### 6. Choose Your Adventure: The 7-Day Fall Challenge

Pick your level for the week ahead and see how easy it is to make a difference:

- 🟢 Level 1 (Casual): Commit to using a reusable mug for all hot drinks this week: coffee, tea, cider, or cocoa. No single-use cups at your desk, on your commute, or at weekend outings.

- 🔵 Level 2 (Dedicated): Try a "Lights-Down Evening." One night this week, turn off overhead lights, unplug devices, lower the thermostat slightly, and enjoy a cozy evening with candles, reading, or stargazing.

Have a fantastic, sustainable fall!

## A Sustainable Reset: Small Changes That Make a Big Difference This Fall

*John Connolly*

As summer comes to an end and students head back to school, many of us find ourselves returning to familiar routines as well. Fall often feels like a fresh start, making it the perfect time to take a closer look at our daily habits and identify small ways to become more sustainable at home and in the workplace.

When people think about sustainability, they often imagine large-scale projects and major investments. While those efforts are certainly important, sustainability can also be achieved through simple actions that require little effort and can make a meaningful difference over time.

One of the easiest places to start is by reducing paper consumption. Although technology has significantly decreased our reliance on printed documents, many organizations still generate large amounts of paper waste. Before printing, consider whether a document truly needs a hard copy. When printing is necessary, using double-sided settings can help reduce paper usage and costs.

Fall is also a good time to evaluate energy use. As temperatures begin to cool, many offices and homes transition from air conditioning to heating. Ensuring that thermostats are properly programmed and that heating systems are operating efficiently can reduce energy consumption while keeping occupants comfortable. Taking advantage of natural light whenever possible can also help decrease electricity use during the workday.

Reusable products offer another simple opportunity for improvement. Many of us purchase coffee, tea, or lunch on busy workdays. Choosing a reusable water bottle, coffee mug, or food container can significantly reduce the amount of disposable waste generated throughout the year. These small decisions may seem insignificant at first, but when practiced consistently, their impact really adds up.

Fall is also a season of giving and community involvement. Many schools, charities, and local organizations host food drives, clothing collections, and volunteer events during this time of year. Participating in these initiatives supports the social side of sustainability by helping strengthen and improve our communities.

Transportation is another area where small changes can have a positive impact. For those who commute to the office, carpooling, public transportation, walking, or cycling, when practical can help reduce emissions and traffic congestion. Even making these choices a few times each month can contribute to a more sustainable lifestyle.

Perhaps the most important lesson is that sustainability is not about perfection. It is about making thoughtful choices and continuously looking for opportunities to improve. Just as students begin each school year with new goals and aspirations, the arrival of fall provides an opportunity for all of us to reset, reassess, and adopt habits that benefit both our organizations and the environment.

By making a few small changes this season, we can collectively create a positive impact that extends well beyond the fall months. Sometimes the simplest actions are the ones that make the biggest difference.

Happy Fall!

## A Greener Holiday Season: 5 Ways to Make the Usual Planning a Little Greener

*Gayatri Joshi*

Before the holiday rush hits, offices can make a few simple changes to celebrate with less waste. The key is to think beyond what happens during the party and to plan for what happens before and after. The usual green advice is pretty simple: reduce, reuse, recycle. Here's a little twist: some easy ways to take those ideas one step further this holiday season.

**Reuse your decor and share what you don't need.**
Now, before the season is fully underway, it's time to go through holiday decorations. If you have extra items or items you no longer need, instead of storing them for another year, offer them to another office, school or community group, or put them on a local sharing platform. For the decor you keep, think reusable and versatile: lights, vases, wreaths, table runners and other pieces that can come back year after year. Choose pieces that will work across different holidays or seasons. The more occasions a piece can serve, the less you need to buy and store it.

**Plan for the day after and put leftovers to work.**
Go one step beyond the usual party planning and think about what gets left behind. If employees can take food home or a portion can be donated, that's a great first step. But if that isn't possible or you have substantially more food than you can use, think about the next day.

When planning the menu, choose food that will hold up well and can be brought back and shared in the office the next day. Sandwiches and desserts are easy candidates, and putting out smaller amounts and refilling more often can help you keep food fresh and reduce what gets spoiled.

Pick the right day. If you know the office will be closed or quiet, choose another day when more employees will be in, if feasible. Let everyone know there will be a post-party spread in the office. You can take this a step further by planning the menu with the next day in mind and ordering accordingly. It turns excess food into an extra office treat instead of waste.

Just remember, perishable foods need to be refrigerated promptly and handled according to food safety guidelines, so check with your caterer about what can be safely served the next day.

🍃 **September: Focus on Energy, Air Quality & Back-to-Routine**

- **Sept 16:** International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer – Perfect for discussing refrigerants, HVAC efficiency, and responsible cooling/heating transitions.
- **Sept 22:** World Car Free Day – Encourage walking, biking, or public transit as the weather cools.

🍂 **October: Focus on Circularity & Waste Reduction**

- **Oct 7:** Energy Efficiency Day – A great hook for sharing building or office energy saving initiatives.
- **Oct 14:** International E-Waste Day – Encourage responsible disposal of electronics before holiday upgrades begin.
- **Oct 20:** World Tree Day – Celebrate reforestation and local tree-planting efforts.

🌾 **November: Focus on Food, Gratitude & Conservation**

- **Nov 1:** World Vegan Day – Highlight plant-forward meals and sustainable holiday cooking.
- **Nov 6:** International Day for Preventing Food Waste & Loss – Perfect for pre-Thanksgiving messaging.
- **Nov 15:** America Recycles Day – Encourage proper recycling before holiday packaging season.

### Make the experience the gift. If there's a takeaway, make it count.

Instead of another branded item that may eventually be tossed, make the activity itself the gift. Try a pottery, candle-making, cooking or floral-arranging class where employees make something to take home. A wine tasting where everyone leaves with a bottle is another option. Even décor can become a gift, like potted plants or arrangements employees can take home.

Think small, useful or consumable. The best take-home gifts don't have to be big. A handmade item, a bottle to enjoy later, a small plant or something employees created themselves can feel more personal and won't necessarily become another thing they need to find a place for at home. You can also make the activity part of the holiday celebration itself. Instead of adding a separate gift to the budget, put that money toward an experience employees can enjoy together. And if a traditional gift is part of the celebration, consider giving employees a choice. A small online gift store works well for this, where they can choose their own blanket, fleece, tote or other useful item. Employees get something they actually want.

### Consolidate shipping and think beyond the box.

Holiday deliveries can quickly create piles of cardboard and packaging. Combine orders whenever possible and ask vendors to minimize packaging. One larger delivery is often better than several small ones. If you order many items or have a regular order from the same vendor, consider creating a delivery day so multiple orders arrive together.

You can also choose vendors that offer less packaging. Before you order, ask how the items are packaged and if the packaging can be returned or reused (that simple question can influence vendors more than you think). Some vendors offer take-back programs, while others may provide returnable or reusable containers, particularly for food and catering.

And don't overlook packaging itself. Before breaking down every box, see if shipping materials can be reused around the office or saved for another shipment. Donate what you don't need and learn from what's left. Before the year ends, take a look at unused office supplies, furniture, and decor. If something still has life left in it, find a new home rather than letting it sit unused. Do this early enough that another organization can actually put it to use this season.

Take a quick look at what's left after the holiday party. How much food went unused? How much packaging was left behind? Were there supplies or decorations you never needed? You don't need a formal waste audit, but if you do conduct one, that's one step ahead. You just need to take note of what you could have used less of, reused, or handled differently. That information can help you buy, order, and plan more thoughtfully for the following year.

The holidays don't have to be less festive to be less wasteful. A few small, thoughtful changes can add up and sometimes make a celebration greener and more memorable.

## By 2100, Parts of Manhattan Could Be Flooded Every Day
Climate resilience starts with understanding risk

*Gayatri Joshi*

It sounds like something from a sci-fi novel, a future in which Manhattan floods are part of the new normal, not just during major storms. Yet this scenario is under examination by New York City's Lower Manhattan Climate Resilience Study. By 2050, 37% of properties in Lower Manhattan will be at risk from storm surge. By 2100, this will increase to almost 50% of properties, with more than six feet of projected sea-level rise. The study also estimates that 20% of Lower Manhattan's streets will be exposed to daily tidal inundation.

https://www.nyc.gov/assets/lmcr/images/content/pages/floodplains-map.png

The areas shaded in light blue in this map of Lower Manhattan are areas NOAA says could be underwater in 80 years. CBS New York




That may sound like a year 2100 problem. But the more immediate question is this: your firm may already have a plan for a power outage or business continuity emergency, but what about the broader risks of disruption caused by climate change to transportation, buildings and infrastructure that your firm depends on? How well prepared is your office for climate resilience?

Climate resilience is about understanding how extreme heat, intense rainfall, flooding and other climate-related events could affect the infrastructure and people your firm depends on and what happens to those systems when they are disrupted. Ultimately, it is about your ability to continue operating when the systems around you are disrupted.

Now imagine your managing partner says:

*"We need a climate resilience plan for our office to present to the Committee."*

Where do you start?

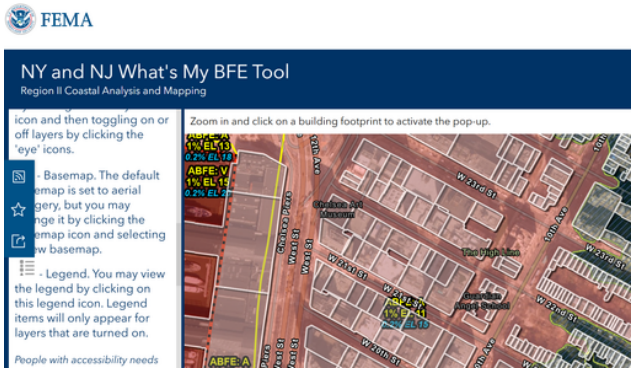
Climate resilience asks us a different question from how to reduce our environmental footprint. It is about assessing the risk that climate change poses to our ability to operate. How does the firm operate? Where does it operate? And what does the business depend on to keep operating?

You might first think, "I'm not responsible for the building." That may be true; however, you do have influence over how your building might address resilience. You can ask better questions of your landlord or property management, understand the building's vulnerabilities and, when the time comes, choose a more resilient office location.

Fortunately, New York City, FEMA, NOAA, and other agencies have useful resources to help assess risk to your office site.

## Start with Your Address

First, where is your office in relation to the flood risk? FEMA allows you to take a property-specific look at flood risk using NY and NJ What's My BFE Tool to view your office's base flood elevation. The tool provides an estimated Base Flood Elevation (BFE), the elevation to which floodwater is expected to rise during a base flood. Once you enter the office address, the results provide a useful first screen of your estimated flood elevation before a professional site-specific assessment.




FEMA NY and NJ What's My BFE Tool (What's My BFE NYNJ | R2 Coastal)

## The question to ask: what is the elevation of our office and how does it compare with the expected flood elevation?

For NYC properties, the NYC flood maps can show both the flood insurance map and coastal flood map. While the BFE map tool provides an elevation for expected floodwater in high-risk areas, this map indicates the extent of the flood risk in flood zones. More simply, together, they give you a better picture of both where the risk is and how high floodwater could reach.

Once the question of whether water will reach the office is answered, the next is to understand whether transportation and related infrastructure will affect employees, clients and vendors coming to the office. Looking beyond the waterfront, NYC Stormwater Flood Maps can help understand the risk of disruption to roads, subways, bridges and other infrastructure and transportation systems that employees rely on. The city uses these maps to examine current and future stormwater flooding under different rainfall scenarios.

NYC Flood Zones | Flood Risk | FloodHelpNY.org

## What about heat?

Flooding is visually compelling, because we can see it. Heat is different, not as visible, but creates significant risks for people, buildings and operations. NYC defines an extreme heat event as two or more days when the heat index reaches 95 degrees Fahrenheit, or one or more days when it reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The heat index combines temperature and humidity to reflect how hot it actually feels. Heat is not distributed evenly across the city and NYC's Heat Vulnerability Index provides a neighborhood-level view of extreme heat vulnerability, which includes factors like surface temperature, green space, air conditioning and income. Neighborhoods are ranked from 1, the lowest risk (yellow), to 5, the highest risk (deep red) reflecting differences in residents' vulnerability during and immediately following extreme heat events.

Interactive heat vulnerability index – Environment & Health Data Portal

**The question to ask: what does the heat map tell you about the neighborhood around your office?**
That leads us to consider how well the building handles extreme heat and potential cooling system failures, as well as how extreme heat affects employee commuting and what happens to the technology and equipment and other assets. These questions become particularly relevant as NYC expects more frequent and intense heat events, with projections that the average number of days at or above 90 degrees Fahrenheit could reach as high as 69 days per year in the 2050s, four times the 1981-2010 average.

**What about air quality?**
Sometimes disruption can come from somewhere else entirely. In June 2023, wildfire smoke from Canada turned NYC skies orange and pushed air quality into the "unhealthy" and, at times, "hazardous" range even though the source of disruption was hundreds of miles away. The city experienced another significant smoke event in 2026. Air quality not only changes day to day; it can also vary by neighborhood and by season, and different pollutants follow different patterns. **NYC's Community Air Survey** tracks pollutants, including fine particulate matter, such as from vehicles and boilers, and ozone, which tends to be more of a summer concern. It allows comparison of annual and seasonal conditions by neighborhood. The AirNow Air Quality Index (AQI) provides current and forecast air-quality information, including conditions for particulate matter from wildfire smoke. An AQI of 0-50 is considered good, while 301 or higher is hazardous.
https://www.airnow.gov/

**The question to ask: what does air quality look like around the office, today, in this neighborhood and throughout the year?**
When conditions deteriorate, practical questions arise: Is it safe for employees to commute to the office, should outdoor events be cancelled, can the HVAC adequately meet the demands of filtering the air? How do you meet the needs of employees who are sensitive to poor air quality, and if the conditions persist, can people effectively work from another location?

**What about green space?**
Flooding, heat and air quality are some of the climate risks, but what might make one neighborhood more resilient than another? NYC Parks describes trees as part of the City's urban infrastructure, providing benefits that extend beyond the park. Trees and vegetation improve air quality, provide shade, reduce surface temperatures and can help absorb and manage stormwater. NYC offers several ways to look at the physical environment around an office. Tree Folio NYC provides a shade analysis and 3D building overlay with the tree mapping across the city. The NYC Parks Tree Map explores trees managed by NYC Parks throughout the city. And the City's Green Infrastructure resources show where rain gardens, garden medians, and other infrastructure are used to capture and manage stormwater.
Tree Folio NYC: A Digital Twin of New York City's Urban Canopy
Battery Park City-Lower Manhattan Trees

**The question to ask: what does the physical environment around our office tell us about the conditions our people may experience?**
A tree map and green infrastructure map can add another layer to your resilience plan. Two offices may have the same regional temperature, but conditions employees experience on the street level, depending on shade, vegetation, and access to green space can greatly vary. For a firm evaluating its current or future office, the neighborhood is part of the operating environment. Where people walk, the shade, amount of rainwater, and all the conditions employees encounter on their way to work, become relevant.



## What's New York City doing?

New York City is already investing billions in climate resilience. The City's FY2027 Climate Budget allocated $7.5 billion to projects targeted for flooding, more than $1 billion for extreme heat, almost $1 billion for stormwater and green infrastructure and $174 million towards tree canopy preservation and expansion. In Lower Manhattan, more than $2.7 billion is committed to five coastal-resilience projects, such as the Battery Coastal Resilience, a $200 million project to rebuild and elevate the waterfront, expected to be completed in 2027. In Queens, $8.4 million is being spent to convert concrete medians into stormwater-absorbing green infrastructure, and in Brooklyn, the $95 million Cloudburst project is using porous pavement and underground storage to manage intense rainfall. These projects illustrate that the infrastructure around your office is changing as well. That matters when a firm evaluates a building, negotiates a lease or considers where its people will work in the future.

## Resilience starts with understanding risk

Climate resilience is about understanding the conditions under which a firm operates and how those conditions might change. What does the firm depend on, where are those dependencies vulnerable, and how will we continue to operate when something outside of our control is disrupted? Start with your office address and the map. You don't need to predict the future to plan; you need to understand what could disrupt your business and decide what you can do about it.

## Basic questions to get started

- What climate risks affect our current office location?
- What does the location look like across multiple hazards, not just flooding?
- What risks could increase over the life of our next lease?
- What could disrupt our ability to get people to the office or home?
- What happens if the building loses power, cooling, water, internet, etc.?
- Where are our critical systems and equipment located?
- How resilient is our building?
- Which business functions must continue if faced with disruption?
- Can our people work securely from another location, if needed?
- What should we ask before renewing our lease or choosing our next office?
- What risks can we address ourselves, and which require action from the landlord, building management or from the City?
- What is the one vulnerability we should address first?

# A Climate Resilience Toolkit for Your Office

| Resource | What it tells you | How to use it |
|---|---|---|
| FEMA NY/NJ What's My BFE Tool | Estimated Base Flood Elevation | Enter your office address and compare the estimated flood elevation with the property's elevation as a first screen of flood exposure. |
| NYC Flood Maps | Flood zones and coastal flood exposure | Look at the property's flood zone and understand the extent of coastal flood risk around the office. |
| NYC Stormwater Flood Maps | Current and projected rainfall-related flooding | Look beyond the building to see how intense rainfall could affect surrounding streets and transportation routes. |
| NYC Heat Vulnerability Index | Neighborhood-level vulnerability to extreme heat | Look at the area around the office and compare heat vulnerability with other potential office locations. |
| NYC Community Air Survey | Long-term neighborhood air-quality patterns | Examine annual and seasonal pollution patterns around the office rather than relying only on a single day's AQI. |
| AirNow AQI / Fire and Smoke Map | Current air quality and wildfire-smoke conditions | Use during smoke events and other periods of poor air quality to understand current conditions and potential health concerns. |
| Tree Folio NYC | Trees, shade and the urban canopy around a location | Explore the physical environment around the office and examine the amount and characteristics of surrounding tree cover. |
| NYC Parks Tree Map | Trees managed by NYC Parks | Look at the trees and green spaces surrounding the office or potential office locations. |
| NYC Green Infrastructure | City infrastructure designed to manage stormwater | Look for rain gardens, green infrastructure and other measures intended to capture and manage stormwater. |
| NYC Hurricane Evacuation Zone Finder | Whether a property is within an evacuation zone | Check the office location and understand what an evacuation order could mean for business operations. |
| NYC Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines | How the City incorporates future climate conditions into infrastructure design | Useful background for understanding how NYC is planning for future heat, precipitation and sea-level rise. |



## A More Sustainable Thanksgiving: Simple Ways to Celebrate with Less Waste

*Donna Saccone*

Thanksgiving is a time to gather with family and friends, share a meal, and appreciate the people and things that matter most. It can also be an opportunity to make choices that are kinder to the planet. From planning the menu to handling leftovers, small changes can make Thanksgiving more sustainable without taking away from the traditions that make the holiday special.

### Plan Before You Shop

One of the simplest ways to have a greener Thanksgiving is to avoid buying more food than you need. Before heading to the grocery store, check your refrigerator, freezer, and pantry. Then make a shopping list based on the number of people attending and the dishes you actually plan to prepare.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends preventing food waste at its source by planning meals, taking inventory of what you already have, and purchasing only what you expect to use. Wasting food also means wasting the water, energy, land, transportation, and labor that went into producing it.

### Choose Seasonal and Local Foods

Thanksgiving naturally lends itself to seasonal foods such as pumpkins, squash, apples, sweet potatoes, cranberries, and root vegetables. Choosing foods that are in season can make the meal feel connected to the time of year while supporting farmers and local food producers.

### Reduce Single-Use Waste

A sustainable celebration does not require buying new decorations or disposable tableware. Use dishes, glasses, cloth napkins, and utensils that you already own. For decorations, natural materials such as leaves, pinecones, branches, and seasonal produce can create an attractive table without creating a lot of trash.

If disposable items are necessary for a large gathering, look for reusable or appropriately recyclable alternatives and check your local recycling rules rather than assuming an item belongs in the recycling bin.

### Make Gratitude Part of the Tradition

Sustainable living is not about having a perfect holiday. It is about making thoughtful choices and recognizing that everyday decisions have an impact. This Thanksgiving, try buying only what you need, choosing seasonal foods, avoiding unnecessary disposable products, sharing excess food, and making a plan for leftovers. These small actions can reduce waste, save money, and help protect the resources that make our celebrations possible.

Ultimately, a sustainable Thanksgiving is about more than reducing trash. It is about practicing gratitude for our food, our communities, and the environment and carrying that spirit into the rest of the year.



## Décor from Discards: Sustainable Fall & Winter Design Ideas

*Camille Gallardo*

The seasons of crisp air, cozy gatherings, and festive cheer don't require a shopping spree or spending too much money. This year, transform what you would normally discard into stunning seasonal decorations that celebrate both creativity and environmental responsibility.

### Reborn Packaging

Styrofoam packing peanuts and protective foam from shipments make perfect bases for elaborate wall hangings and mantel displays. Cover them with gathered pinecones, dried leaves, seed pods, and twigs using hot glue, a strong adhesive or pins. Paint the foam a deep forest green, burnt umber or rich burgundy, then add natural elements for texture and visual interest. String multiple decorated panels together to create an eye-catching garland that rivals store-bought alternatives or you can even make a wreath.

### Cardboard Reimagined

Old shipping boxes, paper towel tubes, and cereal cartons become architectural wonders with minimal effort. Cut cardboard into geometric shapes (stars, snowflakes, and trees) then layer them to create dimensional wall art. Wrap with burlap, craft paper, or reclaimed fabric scraps. Add dried herbs like cinnamon sticks and bay leaves for authentic seasonal fragrance and visual warmth.

### Jar and Glass Garden

Glass jars destined for recycling bins transform into rustic luminaries and terrarium-inspired displays. Fill them with collected fallen branches, colorful autumn leaves preserved between two layers of clear packing tape, or layers of sand, pebbles, and evergreen clippings. String small battery-operated lights inside for ambiance or simply admire the natural compositions from outside. An alternative is to simply adhere fallen leaves to the inside of the glass with ModPodge.

### Fabric Scraps and Thread

Shredded newspapers, old fabric scraps, and worn-out sweaters become luxurious wall hangings and textile art. Wrap discarded picture frames with colorful yarn and fabric strips in seasonal tones burnt orange, deep plum, forest green, and cream. Create twisted rope garlands from old t-shirts or bed sheets or fashion ornaments by stuffing small fabric remnants with dried leaves and herbs before stitching closed.

### Wood & Bark Treasures

Fallen branches collected during autumn walks become stunning focal points for any room. Arrange them in tall vases as bare but elegant centerpieces or bundle them with twine to create rustic wall installations. Birch bark peeling naturally from fallen trees adds organic texture to displays. Slice logs into thin rounds to use as trivets, coasters, or placeholders for candles. Fun fact: Every year, trees grow a new ring, which helps us track the tree's age, health and environmental conditions. The rings act as a record of ecological phenomena such as droughts, floods, and other climate changes over its existence.

### Nature's Dried Goods

Fallen leaves, seeds, and flowers offer free decorative abundance. Press leaves between parchment paper under heavy books for flattened specimens to frame or arrange in shadow boxes. Collect acorns, hickory nuts, and seed pods in clear glass bowls as sculptural centerpieces. Hang dried citrus slices (lemon, lime, and orange) as fragrant ornaments alongside dried hydrangea blooms and sturdy seed heads from the garden.

### The Sustainable Advantage

Creating seasonal décor from reclaimed materials does more than beautify your home; it reflects personal values and craftsmanship that mass-produced items cannot replicate. Each piece carries the story of items rescued from waste streams, given new purpose and upcycled, which ultimately shows that your decorations are displayed with intention. Your pieces become conversation starters that inspire guests to think differently about how and what they discard. This fall and winter, let nature and creativity be your interior designer. The materials are already around you, waiting to be seen with fresh eyes and transformed into décor that's as good for the planet as it is for your space.

### References & Tutorials


- Decoupage Leaves on a Mason Jar
- DIY Fall Decor: 16 Recycled Projects
- Recycled Fall
- Upcycled Fall Décor Video
- The Real Lord of the Rings: Tales Beneath the Bark




## Making the Most of Thanksgiving Leftovers

*Camille Gallardo*

Every year, I plan carefully. I make my shopping list, estimate portions, and count heads before the first guest arrives. Even so, I end up with a few extra staples: a container of mashed potatoes, a dish of mac and cheese that disappeared early in the meal and then wasn't replenished, and a turkey carcass that's far too good to toss. The good news is that leftovers don't have to become a chore. With a little creativity, they can become something you look forward to.

The possibilities are endless, but here are a few of my favorite ways to upcycle the usual suspects...



### Mashed Potato Croquettes

Leftover mashed potatoes are the easiest starting point, because they already have the texture and seasoning you need. Chill them in the refrigerator for at least an hour so they're firm enough to handle. Then choose a filling. Shredded turkey or diced ham works well, and a quick pulse in a food processor with a spoonful of gravy or one of your extra sides, such as green beans or stuffing, makes a savory, spreadable mixture. Roll a spoonful of potato around the filling, shape it into a log or ball, then dredge it in flour, egg, and breadcrumbs. Fry until golden or bake at 425°F for about 20 minutes if you'd rather skip the oil. Serve them with a dollop of cranberry sauce or a quick gravy for dipping.



### Crispy Mac and Cheese Balls

Cold mac and cheese may look unpromising, but it's the perfect candidate for a crispy, cheesy snack. Chill it until it's firm, then scoop it into balls. Before you bread them, try mixing a beaten egg or two into the leftovers and seasoning the mixture to your taste. This is where you can have fun. Add chopped jalapeños for heat, a pinch of smoked paprika or cayenne for a kick, or crumbled bacon for a salty crunch. Coat the balls in flour, egg, and panko (Japanese breadcrumb that is coarser for extra crunch), then fry them at 350°F until the outside is deep golden and the center is hot and melty. A little sprinkle of flaky salt right after they come out of the oil makes them even better.



### Turkey Carcass Stock

Don't throw away that carcass. It's the foundation for a rich, homemade stock that tastes far better than anything in a carton. Place the bones in a large stockpot with a roughly chopped onion, a couple of carrots, a celery stalk, a few peppercorns, and a bay leaf. Cover with cold water, bring it to a gentle simmer, and let it cook for three to four hours, skimming any foam that rises to the top. Strain the liquid, let it cool, and refrigerate it so the fat hardens on the surface, then lift it off. The stock keeps in the refrigerator for about five days and freezes well for several months. Use it as a base for soups, risottos, or gravy, and you'll have a head start on your next few meals.



### Turkey and Cranberry Panini

By the third day, even the most devoted fan of traditional leftovers may be ready for a change. That's where a panini comes in. Bringing flavors from another cuisine can give familiar ingredients a whole new personality. Start with sourdough or ciabatta and spread a light layer of Dijon mayonnaise on the inside. Add thinly sliced turkey, a generous spoonful of cranberry sauce, and a few slices of warm brie. The brie melts into the bread while the cranberry adds a tart sweetness, and the Dijon brings a sharp bite that ties everything together. Press it in a panini maker or a hot skillet with a heavy pan on top until the bread is golden and crisp. The result has French and Italian notes, and it's a sandwich you'll want to make again, even when there's no turkey left to spare.



## Fall Recipe Corner: Butternut & Acorn Squash Soup

*Camille Gallardo*

Serves: 6
Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 1 hour

### Ingredients:

- 1 large butternut squash (2 1/2 to 3 pounds), halved lengthwise and seeded
- 1 acorn squash (halved lengthwise and seeded)
- 2 Tbsp olive oil, to coat bottom of pot/Dutch oven
- 1-2 Tbsp avocado oil or other neutral oil with high smoke point
- 1 large, sweet onion - diced
- 1 medium carrot - diced
- 2-3 celery stalks - diced
- 1/2 Tsp Sea salt, plus more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp fresh sage – finely chopped
- 1 Tsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 Tsp turmeric
- 3 to 4 cups of stock, your choice
- ¼ cup of heavy cream or half & half

### Instructions

Preheat the oven to 425°F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Drizzle the squash halves with avocado oil and season with salt and pepper. Place them cut side down on the baking sheet and roast until soft, 40 to 50 minutes. Let cool, then scoop out the flesh and discard the skin.

Warm the olive oil in a large pot/Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, celery (mirepoix), salt, and several grinds of pepper, and cook, stirring, for about 5 to 8 minutes, until the onion and celery are soft and almost translucent. Add the roasted acorn and butternut squash, garlic, sage, ginger, and turmeric and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds to 1 minute (careful not to burn the garlic). Add stock of choice, bring to a boil, and then let simmer, covered, until everything is cooked through. Let cool for about 5 minutes.

Carefully transfer the mixture to a blender. Blend until smooth, adding more broth as needed to reach a consistency you like. Stir in the heavy cream or half & half, then season to taste with additional salt and pepper.

### Serving Suggestions

Serve the soup warm, topped as you like with toasted pepitas (aka pumpkin seeds), a drizzle of olive oil, croutons, or fresh herbs.