



Frugal French Homestead *La Cucina Povera*



→ Potager to Pantry Series ←

→ Living Well on Less ←

Frugal French Homestead

Think Differently about Food

Simple Seasonal Cooking ...

From Potager to Pantry

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Chassignolles-en-Berry*



“Welcome”

Let's Have Fun Stretching the Budget

This is Feel-Good Frugality!

Inspired by Nanna (my Yorkshire Grandmother)

With a nod to the writing of Elizabeth David

Who brought the Mediterranean into British kitchens

From the Frugal French Homestead

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From Potager to Pantry...



Olive



Rosemary



Thyme



Basil



Mint



Parsley



Tarragon



Chives

Simple Summer Salads

Early summer cooking needs very little. I think in a way we want to welcome the warmer weather with more carefree mealtimes and the recipes here reflect that.

All you need is:

A few herbs.

A little lemon.

Fresh leaves.

Olive oil or alternative like rapeseed (a gourmet item now in my home county of Yorkshire)

Bread warmed in the oven while the evening cools outside, to give the illusion of a hot meal!

I recently realized that my passion for salad dressing (including the simplest Italian oil and vinegar) wasn't as widespread as I'd thought. I put simple lemon juice on a green salad and had someone who generally dislikes salad asking for a second helping.

A simple green lettuce and cucumber salad can be transformed by lemon juice and a springling of herbs.

Avocados, which are often considered expensive stretch surprisingly well when sliced thinly or roughly mashed with a fork with dressing. No one needs that 1970s half an avocado anymore as a starter. Drape (what a super work for a salad) thin slices across tomatoes or on the top of a lentil salad.

Lentil salads remain one of the most underused and useful summer dishes: filling, inexpensive, nutritious and improved by garlic, parsley, mint, or chives gathered fresh from the garden. They soak up flavour and any vinegar you have in the store cupboard can transform a lentil salad.

Roasted vegetables roasted slowly in a little olive oil are my all-time favourite summer ingredient. Once roasted they stay in the fridge in a little oil for up to a week. I hope they become one of your summer staples. They can be served warm with rice or pasta one evening, then tucked into sandwiches or salads over the next few days.

A simple herb omelette, cut in two with a large salad and even braised potatoes is a frugal treat.

Nothing complicated is required for Feel Good Frugal Food.

All you need to do is look differently at simple ingredients, and when they stretch longer they become thrifty.

I am working on a longer recipe booklet with a meal planner to save money – so watch out for this in the weeks ahead.

Lettuce with Lemon & Herbs

A simple salad for long summer evenings.

Tear crisp lettuce leaves or spinach into a large bowl.

Drizzle with olive oil and fresh lemon juice, then season with sea salt and black pepper.

Scatter generously with chopped parsley, chives, mint, or whatever herbs are growing nearby.

Serve with warm bread or sautéed potatoes.

Lentil Salad with Garlic & Mint

Frugal, filling & full of flavour of the Berry in Hidden France.

Cook green or brown lentils until just tender, then allow to cool slightly.

Toss with olive oil, lemon juice, crushed garlic, chopped mint, and parsley.

Make sure you add plenty of dressing as the lentils soak it up.

Add diced cucumber or tomatoes, chives, or roasted vegetables. Use what you have available and make your own recipe.

I like to add cubes of Feta cheese or goats' cheese – but it raises the cost.

Serve warm or chilled beside bread, cheese, or other salads.

Summer Salads & Simple Plates



Early summer brings abundance from the garden—crisp leaves, herbs, peppers, and the first tomatoes. These salads are frugal, filling and full of flavour.



Make avocado last: add lemon, stretch with beans or lentils, and serve with plenty of herbs and greens.

Tomato Bruschetta

Simple ingredients become something generously Italian. Close your eyes and imagine a shimmering Italian lake in the summer sunshine.

Toast slices of bread until crisp and golden.

Rub lightly with garlic while still warm.

Top with chopped tomatoes, olive oil, sea salt, and torn basil or parsley.

If you have a grill you can warm from above – I don't and it isn't essential.

Serve immediately while the bread is still warm.

Stretching the Ingredients

Cook once. Enjoy twice.

Roasted vegetables made for supper often become tomorrow's salad, picnic filling, pasta sauce, or bruschetta topping.

A bowl waiting quietly in the fridge is the beginning of several future meals.



Scented Pasta & Suppers

Pasta remains one of the great allies of the frugal kitchen.

How is it that a tin of plum tomatoes becomes transformed into a fragrant sauce?

Garlic changes the atmosphere immediately. We are transported to the countryside. Herbs and chilli add warmth and depth.

Adding water added slowly to simmering tomatoes helps create something richer and more generous than expected.

One pan can stretch to several meals and stretch across the week.

A little mushroom, garlic, and parsley folded into pasta.

A low-cost carbonara built from eggs and black pepper rather than expensive additions.

A deconstructed lasagne ... using roasted vegetables, tomato sauce, and scattered pasta layers rather than heavy amounts of meat and cheese.

What more could anyone want for a simple meal? It is flavour, comfort, and frugal at the same time.

Pasta for Lunch or Supper

Comforting meals from pantry shelves and garden herbs.

Quick Tomato Herb Sauce

Simple, generous, endlessly useful.

Ingredients

- 1 tin plum tomatoes
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1–2 tbsp olive oil
- Small handful of herbs (parsley, basil, oregano, or thyme)
- Salt and black pepper
- Splash of water

Method

Gently simmer the tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, and a splash of water in a pan for 15–20 minutes.

Break the tomatoes down with a spoon as they soften.

Season well and stir through chopped herbs before serving over pasta.

Add cheese to taste – and vary the cheese it doesn't have to be expensive Parmesan.

Hot Pepper Tomato Pasta

Simple pantry food with warmth and depth.

Ingredients

- 1 portion tomato herb sauce (from the day before?!)
- Chilli flakes or fresh chilli
- Small handful black olives (optional)
- Pasta of choice
- Olive oil
- Parsley or basil

Method

Prepare the tomato herb sauce and add chilli to taste.

Add olives if using.

Toss with hot pasta and a spoonful of pasta water for a silky sauce.

Scatter generously with parsley or basil.

Low-Cost Carbonara

Comforting food from very little.

Ingredients

- Pasta
- 2 eggs
- Small handful grated cheese
- Bacon or ham (optional)
- Black pepper
- 1 garlic clove
- Olive oil

Method

Cook the pasta until al dente (to preference)

Meanwhile, whisk together the eggs, cheese, and black pepper.

Warm garlic, with lean bacon, gently in a little olive oil.

Drain the pasta, reserving a little cooking water, then stir quickly through the egg mixture.

Add a splash of pasta water if needed to loosen the sauce.

Deconstructed Lasagne

Roasted vegetables become tomorrow's supper.

Ingredients

- Roasted vegetables
- Tomato sauce
- Cooked pasta
- Cheese if available
- Black pepper and herbs

Method

Layer roasted vegetables, tomato sauce, and cooked pasta loosely into an oven dish.

Scatter with cheese and herbs.

Bake until bubbling and golden around the edges.

Perfect for using the bowl of roasted vegetables waiting quietly in the fridge.

Stretch the Ingredients

Plan once. Enjoy twice.

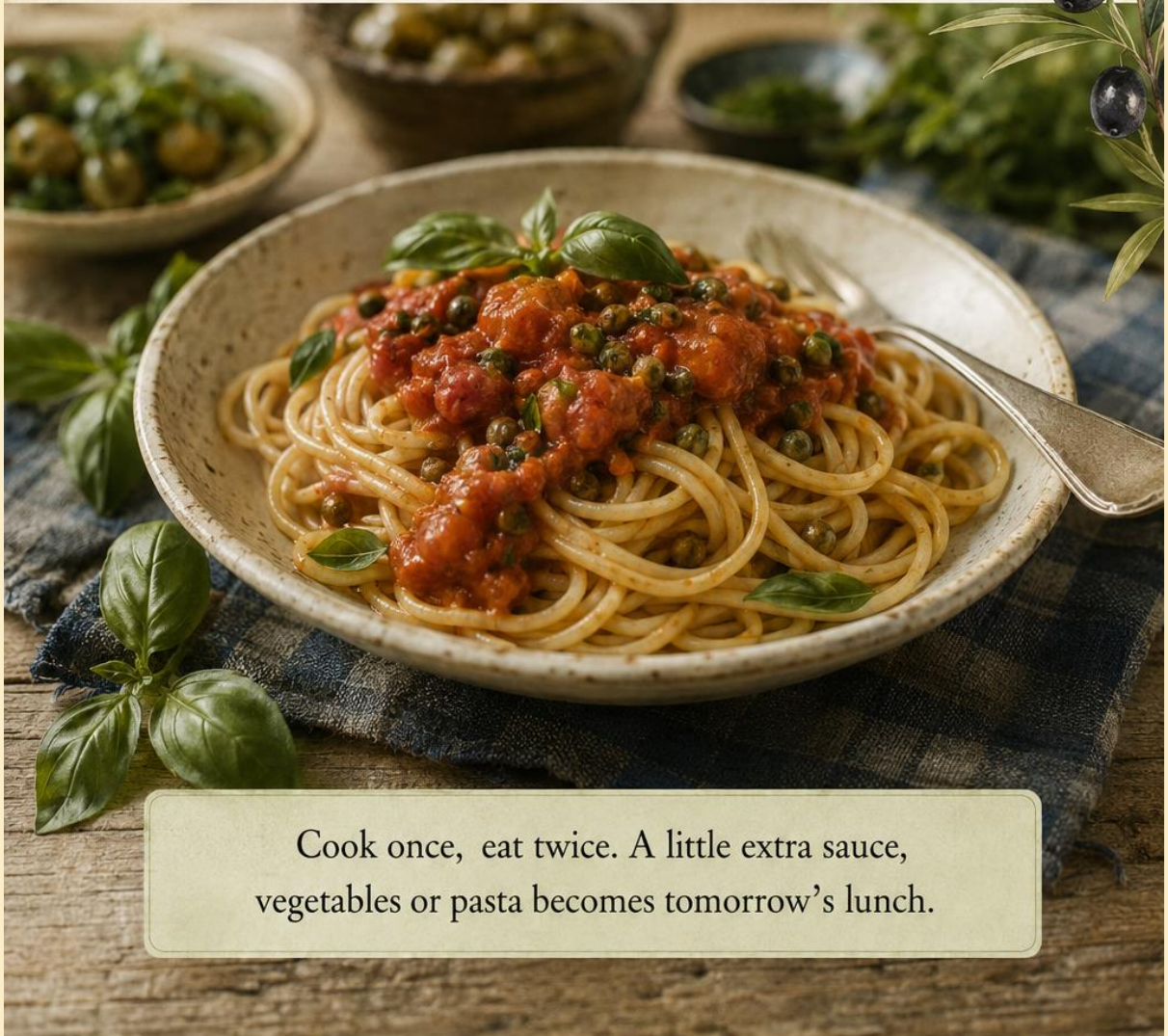
A little extra sauce made today often becomes tomorrow's lunch, soup base, or bruschetta topping.

Simple cooking grows gradually across several days. That's how my Nanna planned her week of menus all her life. The planning can flow across several days.

Pasta, Tomatoes & Suppers



With a tin of tomatoes, a few herbs and a little imagination, you can create comforting meals that taste far greater than the sum of their parts.



Cook once, eat twice. A little extra sauce, vegetables or pasta becomes tomorrow's lunch.

Pas Trop Cher Apero

One of the quiet pleasures of French summer life is the apero. Small tasty bites shared before supper.

I think this can be a meal in itself on a hot day – cicchetti or tapas.

Fortunately, this can also be one of the cheapest ways to gather.

Tomato bruschetta rubbed with garlic.
Slices of toasted bread with herbs and olive oil.
A few olives.
Simple rustic rusks or crackers.
Cold lentils with vinaigrette.

I always feel in a party mood when we have apero!

Somehow, food eaten slowly outdoors always seems to feel more carefree

I wrote an article on Rustic Rusks based on traditional Norfolk Rusks on Substack last year.

[Lots of ideas for Rustic Rusks](#)

Pas Trop Cher Apero



A few simple bites, something to sip,
and time to enjoy the evening light.



Good bread, garlic, herbs and olive oil—
they go a long way.

Rustic Rusks (aka Norfolk Rusks)

An old farmhouse recipe adapted for apero boards and simple summer suppers.

Ingredients

- 225g self-raising flour
- 110g butter or margarine
- Pinch of salt
- 1 egg, beaten
- Small amount of milk

Method

Rub the flour and butter together until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

Add the salt and beaten egg, mixing gently with a fork.

Add just enough milk to bring everything together into a soft dough, similar to shortcrust pastry.

Roll out to roughly 2–3 cm thick and cut into rounds.

Bake on a lined tray in a hot oven (220°C) for about 10 minutes until lightly risen.

Reduce the oven to 190°C.

Cut the rusks in half and return them to the oven, cut side upwards, until crisp and golden.

Store in an airtight tin or jar.

From Farmhouse Table to Apero Board

Traditionally these rusks were served simply with butter and cheese.

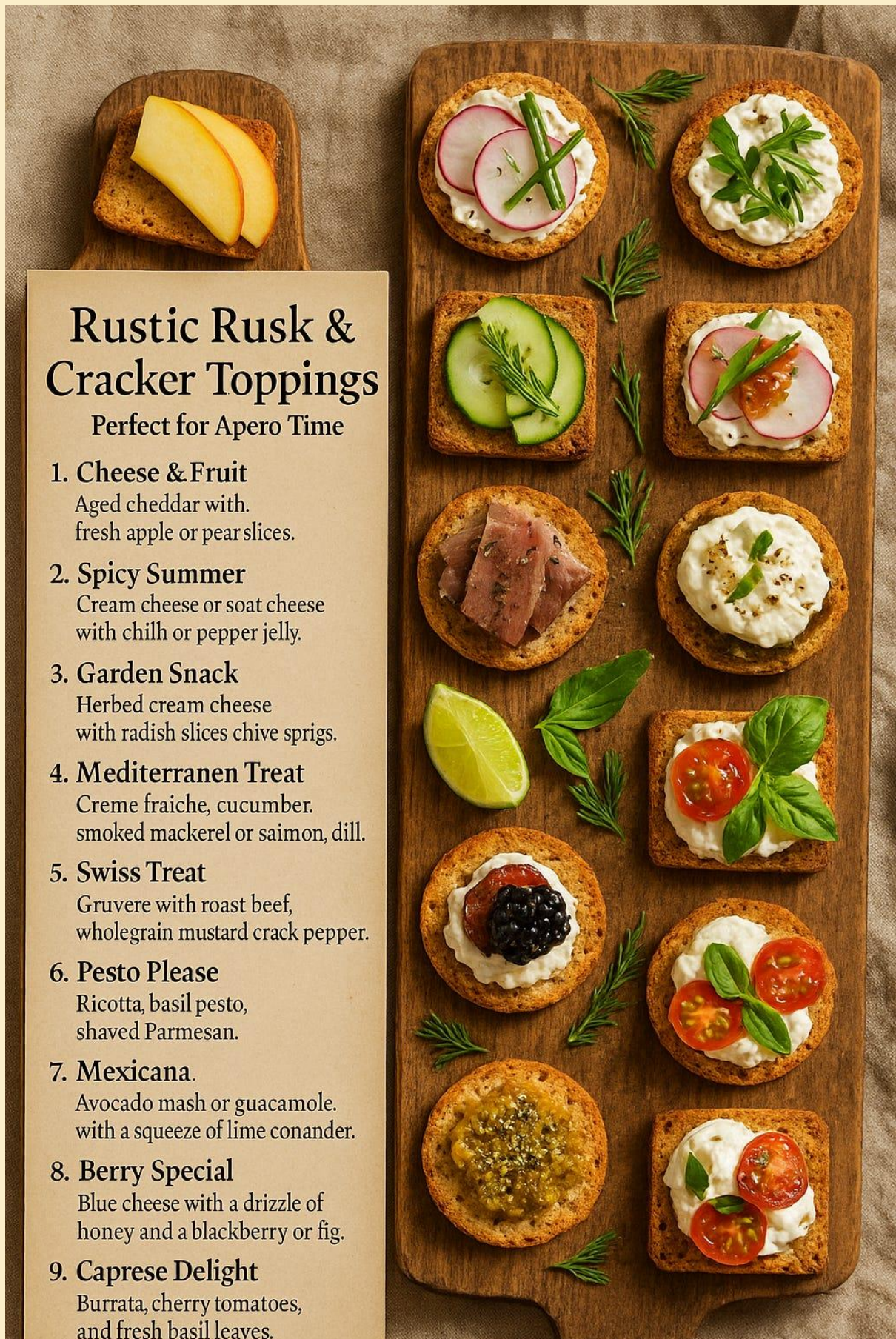
Here at the Frugal French Homestead, they have become part of our *pas trop cher apero*: topped with roasted vegetables, herb oil, tomatoes, lentils, soft cheese, or garden herbs.

A simple old recipe transformed into something generous and summery.

Rustic Rusk & Cracker Toppings

Perfect for Apero Time

- 1. Cheese & Fruit**
Aged cheddar with fresh apple or pear slices.
- 2. Spicy Summer**
Cream cheese or goat cheese with chilli or pepper jelly.
- 3. Garden Snack**
Herbed cream cheese with radish slices chive sprigs.
- 4. Mediterranean Treat**
Creme fraiche, cucumber, smoked mackerel or salmon, dill.
- 5. Swiss Treat**
Gruyere with roast beef, wholegrain mustard crack pepper.
- 6. Pesto Please**
Ricotta, basil pesto, shaved Parmesan.
- 7. Mexicana.**
Avocado mash or guacamole with a squeeze of lime conander.
- 8. Berry Special**
Blue cheese with a drizzle of honey and a blackberry or fig.
- 9. Caprese Delight**
Burrata, cherry tomatoes, and fresh basil leaves.



Summer Drinks with a Twist

Summer drinks need not be expensive to feel special.

Iced tea stretches beautifully across several days when chilled with mint-filled ice cubes.

Lemonade becomes more economical when softened with sparkling water, herbs, or slices of cucumber.

Wild mint gathered from the garden path transforms plain water immediately.

Chamomile tea, served cold with lemon, becomes surprisingly refreshing on hot evenings – well any time of the day.

Simple additions change the entire mood of a drink: mint, basil, rosemary, citrus peel.

Old-Fashioned Lemonade

Fresh, sharp, and wonderfully economical.

Ingredients

- 2 lemons
- 2–3 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 litre cold water or sparkling water
- Ice
- Mint or lemon balm (optional)

Method

Squeeze the lemons into a jug and add the brown sugar.

Stir well until the sugar begins to dissolve.

Add cold water, plenty of ice, and slices of lemon.

Taste and adjust with more water or sugar if needed.

Add mint or lemon balm for a softer summer flavour.

Serve in a jug or glass carafe outdoors on warm evenings.

Stretch the Ingredients

A little sparkling water, extra ice, mint, or ginger helps homemade lemonade travel surprisingly far while still feeling generous and refreshing.



Summer Drinks with a Twist

→ Potager to Pantry Series ←

La Cucina Povera

Refreshing, frugal and easy to make.
Perfect for long afternoons.



The Cheap Gourmet Picnic

The best frugal meals are often the ones carried outdoors.

A loaf of bread
Eggs.
Garlic oil instead of butter.
Roasted vegetables folded into sandwiches.
Lentil salad packed into jars.
Iced tea with mint.

Nothing elaborate, but good fun.

Somehow, food eaten beneath trees or beside a lane in the early evening always feels special.

This picnic gathers together ideas from the earlier pages: herbs, bread, tomatoes, simple drinks, stretched ingredients, feel good frugality.

This is not extravagant food. It is thoughtful and planned food.

And perhaps this sort of picnic is at the heart of feel-good frugality: pleasure at mealtime does not need to be through spending more.

Ideas for Picnics

The best summer picnics are rarely the most expensive ones.

Bread wrapped in paper with cheese to add – make your own sandwich.
A jar of lentil salad cooled overnight.
Cold roasted vegetables tucked into sandwiches with herbs and olive oil.
A few olives passed slowly around the table.
Homemade rusks scattered with soft cheese, tomatoes, or herb toppings (take the rusks and toppings separately)

A jug of lemonade filled with mint, lemon slices, and plenty of ice.

A wooden board, a linen cloth, or an old basket changes the atmosphere immediately. Eat your picnic underneath a shady trees, beside a quiet lane, or simply in the garden or on the balcony as evening arrives.

Finish with:

Strawberries with lemon balm.
Melon scattered with mint.

Fruit scones wrapped in cloth.
Homemade crisps flavoured with sea salt, herbs, or lemon zest.

The simple things in life. The quiet pleasure of gathering together ordinary ingredients and allowing them to feel special once again.

And perhaps that is the true spirit of cucina povera: good, healthy ingredients which don't cost a fortune and taste good.

The Cheap Gourmet Picnic



Gather a basket. Add colour, flavour and something to drink. Easy is perfect outdoors—
it always tastes better.



Continue the Journey...

This small seasonal booklet will link to a larger Frugal Kitchen Companion exploring:

- frugal French cooking
- stretching ingredients
- herbs and seasonal living
- practical ways of spending less without losing the pleasure of food

Find out more about the Frugal French Homestead on Substack and You tube at:

<https://seasonsinchassignolles.substack.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@frenchcountryjournal>

A bientôt!

Ruth et Nigel

