



Leftovers Challenge

The best way to save money and time in the kitchen is to make abundant meals and use your leftovers wisely. You just need the right approach and a little creativity. Challenge yourself to spend a few days learning the art of making the most of your leftovers.



DAY 1

DAY 2

DAY 3, 4, 5



Shop Smart

Stretching your meals into tasty and cost-effective leftovers begins with choosing good recipes and buying wisely in the first place. Start here:



GO BIG

Plan on big-pan dishes such as vegetarian lasagna and casseroles. Choose some large-scale recipes, such as chicken and veggies on a large tray or a big stew, pasta dish or soup. Then make sure you buy enough to make double servings.

ADD VERSATILITY

To keep your leftovers interesting, stock up on ingredients that can be easily prepared multiple ways. Potatoes can be turned into potato cakes, fresh-cut fries, hash or mashed. Other examples include: beets, carrots, eggs, pasta, beans, rice. These ingredients can add nice twists to your original recipes.

SEE IT A NEW WAY

Whatever your original recipe is, you can almost always reimagine it as a completely new dish. The key is to make sure you're prepared. This means buying wraps, pie shells, phyllo dough, tortillas, broth and leafy greens. Then give your original meal new life with a completely fresh presentation. Check online recipes. You can turn almost anything into a soup, salad, burrito or frittata.

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Store it well

Enjoy your big meal and then make sure that you do a good job saving it (and other ingredients) for future use. Some options to consider:



FREEZE IT

If you've made enough, it's a good idea to freeze part of your leftovers. Having a premade lasagna or casserole in the freezer can be an inexpensive lifesaver on a busy day in a couple of weeks. You can freeze leftovers 3–4 days after a meal, but for taste and texture it's best to freeze food on the same day it was cooked. Just make sure it's well wrapped or in a sealed container to avoid freezer burn. And don't forget to label it.

SAVE IT ALL

When cooking, don't throw away ingredient scraps. Keep the ends of onions, carrots, celery, garlic, mushrooms, and other veggies. Toss them in a freezer bag. They can add a tasty texture to your broth for an easy-to-make soup or stew.

MAKE IT LAST

In your fridge, store leftovers in airtight containers. Choose food-grade plastic or glass to keep meals and ingredients fresh longer. Cooked meats and vegetables are best used or frozen within 3–4 days. Some veggies, such as broccoli and cauliflower, can go bad quickly. To extend shelf life, it's a good idea to roast them early, rather than let them spoil. Later, you can easily add fresh ingredients to enhance your leftovers.

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Get More Days Out of Every Meal

Your original meal pays off for days with convenient leftovers that save you time and money. Here's how to get the most out of it:



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

After a big holiday meal, there are lots of ways to take advantage of all that food. Many families fashion unique post-Thanksgiving casseroles that include all kinds of favorite elements from the big meal. Start with a layer of sweet potatoes and roasted veggies in a casserole dish. Mix in green beans and leftover turkey, add milk, and top with leftover stuffing. Bake 12–15 minutes at 400 degrees. Voilà, it's a new meal!

KEEP IT MOIST

When reheating the same food for an encore meal, the biggest thing to worry about is that it will dry out. As you concoct your leftover masterpiece, be sure to add moisture. This means milk, water, olive oil, and the like. For pastas, water, milk or cream (depending on the type of sauce) is suggested. For proteins such as chicken or beef, broth or olive oil can keep them tender.

GET CREATIVE

Sure, leftovers can be as easy as taking a covered dish from the fridge and putting it in the microwave. It's fast, easy and sometimes seems even tastier than the original. But it's also a good idea to mix things up. Check online recipes. Pasta leftovers, for instance, can easily become pasta salad, noodle soup or pasta frittata. For a protein dish, cut it up, reimagine it as a stir fry and serve over rice. Other options: turn last night's dinner into a delicious omelet. Or have a Taco Tuesday with ingredients left over from an earlier dinner paired with a few new ingredients to keep it fresh.

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