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Leftover Thanksgiving Turkey: Now What?

Thanksgiving is a time to gather with friends and family and enjoy time with each other without thinking about foodborne illnesses and leftover turkey! Two of the biggest questions that are floating around the internet are “How do I properly store a turkey?” and “What do I do with the leftovers?”

If you have any leftover turkey, it is very important to learn the proper steps to storing the leftovers to prevent any foodborne illnesses from occurring. The first thing to do is to cut the turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate within two hours to prevent bacteria from growing and multiplying on food. Slice the breast meat into smaller pieces; legs and wings may be left whole. Keep leftover turkey in the refrigerator and eat within 3 to 4 days or freeze. If you decide to freeze, use frozen turkey within 2 to 6 months for best quality. Lastly, do not overfill your refrigerator as it causes it to work too hard and may not keep food at 40°F or below.

Leftover cooked turkey can be eaten cold or reheated. To reheat your turkey in the oven, set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F. Reheat the turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F, using a food thermometer to check the internal temperature. To keep the turkey moist, add a little broth or water and cover.

Below are a couple of recipes that can use up that leftover Thanksgiving turkey and turn it into something delicious and new!

Turkey Salsa Soup

Yield: 6 Servings

Ingredients:

- 2 cups mild, chunky salsa
- 2 cups frozen whole kernel corn
- 2 (15 ounce) cans black beans
- 2 cups chopped, cooked turkey
- 1 quart (4 cups) low sodium chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Grated, cheddar cheese (optional)

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Combine salsa, corn, black beans, turkey, and chicken broth in a large saucepan or Dutch oven.
3. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.
4. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.
5. If desired, top with grated cheddar cheese.
6. Store leftovers in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to four days.

Turkey Salad

Yield: 5 Cups

Ingredients:

- 4 cups chopped leftover turkey (about 1 1/4 lb.)
- 1 cup chopped celery (from about 2 stalks)
- 1/2 cup chopped shallots
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh dill
- 1/2 cup low-fat mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp celery salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Optional: dried cranberries, nuts

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. In a medium bowl, combine turkey, celery, shallots, and dill.
3. Add mayonnaise, vinegar, and celery salt; season with pepper.
4. Stir until turkey is coated.
5. Serve mixture on whole grain or whole wheat bread, crackers, or veggies.
6. Store leftovers in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to four days.

This information was adapted from the UNL Food Website. To find out more information or want to learn more visit <https://food.unl.edu/article/thanksgiving-central> or call Buffalo County Extension at 308-236-1235.

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