Thanksgiving Leftovers for Future Meals

With a little planning, meals with leftover turkey can be as tasty as your original meal.

Part of the pleasure of a Thanksgiving or other holiday meal is the aroma of a turkey baking in your oven. Continue that great feeling by planning a variety of pleasing post-holiday meals with leftover turkey.

Turkey makes a great first meal plus delicious leftovers that are easy to combine into a variety of scrumptious future meals, reports Nebraska Extension Educator Alice Henneman. Try turkey year round and think “planned-overs” rather than “leftovers” to “cook it quick” with turkey.

Follow these food safety guidelines for handling your turkey leftovers safely:

- Debone turkey and refrigerate all leftovers within 2 hours of cooking.
- For quicker cooling, divide leftovers into smaller portions and place in covered, shallow containers before refrigerating or freezing.
- Use properly stored leftover turkey within 3 to 4 days, stuffing and gravy within 1 to 2 days,
- Freeze any leftovers for use in future meals. For best quality use within 6 months and cover leftover turkey with broth or gravy.
- Leftover turkey may be eaten cold or reheated.
- When reheating turkey, reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165° F until hot and steaming throughout. Reheat in an oven set at 325 degrees, keep moist by adding broth or water. Cover and rotate the leftovers if reheating in a microwave.

Suggestions for using leftover turkey include casseroles, soups, hot and cold sandwiches, enchiladas, and salads. Just think of it as a ready to use protein and let your imagination create some great quick meals. One favorite is Turkey Strata, layer leftover turkey, dressing, vegetables, and gravy in a casserole dish and top with your favorite shredded cheese. Bake at 325 until the center is heated to 165.

For more information, contact your local Nebraska Extension Office or on the web at: food.unl.edu University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension is a responsive, innovative and trusted information source for all Nebraskans.

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