

Cooking Corner: How to make the most of post-feast leftovers

by *Caroline Dipping*

Thanksgiving dinner is the culmination of weeks of planning - of poring over recipes, tracking down allspice and chestnuts, plotting what goes in the oven when, and arranging place cards diplomatically on the table.

LEFTOVER ACHIEVERS - Turkey Panini, featuring turkey slices topped with a mixture of cranberry sauce, mayo and chipotle chile, is a tasty update on the classic post-holiday sandwich. CNS Photo courtesy of Ocean Spray. **POST-FEAST FOOD** - One way to give leftover turkey a fresh look is to team it with greens, avocado slices and orange segments for a main-course salad. CNS Photo courtesy of Butterball. But chances are you haven't given much thought to what happens immediately after your guests polish off that last slice of pecan pie and final cup of coffee.

As you contemplate the ruins of your feast, feeling stuffed and sleepy, you have one more job to do: Store your leftovers properly so you can enjoy them for days to come.

"We like people to have their turkey all cut up and back in the refrigerator two hours after it comes out of the oven," said Mary Clingman, director of the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line. "It doesn't mean you're cleaning up the kitchen at that point, but at least you're getting the food to where it's going to be good the next day."

The two-hour rule doesn't mean your leftovers suddenly become toxic after that, but Clingman said Talk-Line advisers want cooks to err on the side of caution.

"On that day, with everything going on, it's easy for time to get away from us," she said. "If you tell people three hours, they are going to take four."

It's worthwhile to give some thought now to how you will store and use your extra turkey, stuffing and gravy. After all, leftovers are a big part of the joy of Thanksgiving.

The day after Thanksgiving, many people insist on the traditional sandwich of turkey, stuffing, gravy and cranberry sauce. For Cranberry Panini, leftover cranberry sauce is mixed with a little mayonnaise and chipotle to make a spread for the grilled sandwich.

If you grow weary of sandwiches, you can give that turkey a fresh look in a salad. One of Clingman's favorites is the Turkey Citrus Avocado Salad included here.

STORAGE SENSE

Clingman, who has 22 years of experience with the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line, shared a trick that has helped her get the most from her leftover bird.

"When they are carving the turkey, I have a soup pot nearby, and I already have onion, celery and carrots in there. We throw the bones in, and then while we're having dinner and cleaning up, the pot is simmering on the stove."

She only has to strain the broth and throw out the bones, and the next day she decides what to do with all that turkey stock - freeze it or use it for soup.

"That has been a real help to me," she said. "I have not thrown out the carcass since I started doing it."

Here are some other tips about handling leftovers:

- Don't put the whole turkey back in the refrigerator. Remove the stuffing, carve the meat from the bones, and wrap the stuffing and turkey separately. The idea is to cool the leftovers to below 40 degrees as quickly as possible to prevent bacteria from growing. Leftovers cool more quickly in shallow containers.

Clingman takes things a step further by putting her turkey in the refrigerator unwrapped to cool, then taking it out and wrapping it. The meat cools faster without insulating wrapping.

- Use refrigerated turkey, stuffing or gravy within three days.

- If you plan to store leftovers longer, freeze them. Wrap them in heavy foil or freezer wrap or place them in freezer containers. Be sure the food is wrapped tightly. "With frost-free refrigerators, they are sucking moisture out of everything, so if you don't have something really well wrapped, it's going to dry out," Clingman noted.

- For the best quality, consume frozen stuffing in about a month and turkey in two months. After that, the food is still safe to eat, Clingman said, but the quality will begin to decline.

- If you accidentally leave something perishable out for a long time, throw it out. "It may look good and taste good, but it could really make you sick," Clingman said.

Sometimes, she said, the Talk-Line gets calls from people who have left an item out and are reluctant to toss it. "We have people who say, 'Just how sick would I get?' They feel bad about throwing something out. I

wouldn't feel bad about it at all."

The Butterball Turkey Talk-Line, (800) BUTTERBALL, is open from 4 a.m. to 4 p.m. PST on Thanksgiving and 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. the day after.

Thanksgiving help is also available at www.butterball.com.

ROAST TURKEY WITH MUSHROOM HERB SAUCE

1 1/2 teaspoons poultry seasoning

1 teaspoon paprika

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme leaves, crushed

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 (16-pound) turkey, thawed if frozen

Nonstick cooking spray

Mushroom Herb Sauce:

2 tablespoons butter or margarine

1 cup chopped fresh mushrooms

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon dried thyme leaves, crushed

1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 1/2 cups chicken broth

1/2 cup half-and-half

Yields 14 servings.

Preheat oven to 325 F. In small dish, stir together poultry seasoning, paprika, thyme, salt and pepper to make seasoning mixture.

Remove neck and giblets from turkey's cavities. Dry turkey with paper towels. Turn wings back to hold neck skin in place. Place turkey, breast side up, on a flat rack in a shallow roasting pan. Coat turkey with cooking spray and sprinkle with seasoning mixture. Roast turkey 3 to 3 1/2 hours, or until thigh is 180 F on a meat thermometer. Cover breast and top of drumsticks with foil after 2 hours to prevent overcooking. When turkey is done, let it stand 15 minutes before carving.

To make Mushroom Herb Sauce: Melt butter in pan over low heat. Add mushrooms; cook and stir 1 minute. Stir in flour, poultry seasoning, salt, thyme and pepper. Gradually stir in broth and half-and-half. Stir constantly over medium heat until thick. Cook and stir 1 minute more. Serve over turkey.

- Adapted from Butterball.

TURKEY AND CRANBERRY PANINI

2 ciabatta or focaccia rolls, or 4 thick slices Italian bread

2 tablespoons cranberry sauce

2 tablespoons mayonnaise

1 chipotle chile, canned in adobo sauce, finely chopped

1/2 cup fresh spinach or arugula

2 slices onion

8 ounces sliced turkey

2 slices Monterey Jack or Pepper Jack cheese

3 tablespoons olive oil

Yields 2 servings.

Cut rolls in 1/2 lengthwise. Stir cranberry sauce, mayonnaise and chipotle in small bowl until well mixed. For each sandwich, spread cut surfaces of roll with cranberry mayonnaise mixture. Place 1/4 cup greens, 1 onion slice, 4 ounces of turkey and 1 slice of cheese on bottom 1/2 of roll. Place top of roll on sandwich and flatten. Brush both sides of sandwiches with olive oil.

Heat sandwiches in panini press according to manufacturer's directions. Or heat in a large skillet over medium heat. Place a heavy pan on sandwiches and cook 10 minutes, turning once, or until sandwiches are toasted and hot.

- Adapted from Ocean Spray.

TURKEY-CITRUS-AVOCADO SALAD

Dressing:

1/2 cup fresh orange juice

2 tablespoons canola oil

1 tablespoon spicy brown mustard

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper

Salad:

8 ounces field greens salad blend

2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

1 orange, peeled, sectioned, halved

1 avocado, peeled, sliced

1/4 red onion, cut into thin wedges

1 1/2 cups cubed cooked turkey

1/4 cup pumpkin seed kernels (pepitas), if desired

Yields 4 servings.

To make dressing: Beat orange juice, oil, mustard, salt and red pepper in small bowl until well blended. Set aside.

To make salad: Place lettuce in serving bowl or on large serving platter. Top lettuce with cilantro, orange, avocado, red onion and turkey. Drizzle with salad dressing. Top salad with pumpkin seed kernels, if desired.

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