



Give thanks for great leftovers

I think the best part of Thanksgiving is the leftovers, but last year our leftover turkey didn't last very long, and we had to throw a lot of it away. What's the best way to make leftovers last?

Generally, leftovers stored in the refrigerator last only three or four days. That surprises a lot of people, who think they might be good for a week or longer.

This year, refrigerate only the turkey you think you'll use in the next few days and store the rest in the freezer, where it should be fine for two to six months.

Here are some detailed leftover and storage tips for holiday foods from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service:

- Make sure perishable foods are left at room temperature for no longer than two hours before you refrigerate or freeze them. Bacteria can multiply rapidly between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F, so limit the amount of time food is in that "danger zone."

- If the leftovers you're storing are very hot, take steps so they'll cool rapidly to reach the safe temperature of 40 degrees or below as quickly as possible. For example, divide large amounts of food into shallow containers. Slice turkey off the bone into smaller pieces.

- After cooling, wrap leftovers well, in airtight packaging or in

sealed storage containers. Not only will it keep bacteria out, but it helps the leftovers retain moisture, whether they're stored in the refrigerator or the freezer. It also prevents leftovers from picking up odors from other foods in the refrigerator.

- When freezing leftovers, mark the package with a date. Although freezing temperatures of 0 degrees F or below cause microbes to become dormant, preventing the growth of microorganisms that cause both food spoilage and foodborne illness, keeping foods frozen for too long can affect their quality. If your home freezer has a "quick freeze" option, use it, as rapidly freezing foods prevents undesirable large ice crystals from forming. If you have a free-standing freezer in addition to your refrigerator-freezer, use it, as it likely stays colder because it's not opened as often.

- When reheating leftovers, be sure they reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Use a food thermometer.

For more, see the website with the USDA's Safe Food Handling Fact Sheets at http://bit.ly/sf_food. Scroll down to "Leftovers and Food Safety."

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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By Martha Filipic
614-292-9833
filipic.3@osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Linnette Goard, field specialist in Food Safety, Selection and Management for Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

Communications and Technology
Strategic Communications
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
614-292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

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