

# Chicago Tribune

## FOOD & DINING

### Vintage cuisine

#### Reducing your carbon footprint can start by using those leftovers in the fridge

By Rick Asa, Special to Tribune Newspapers

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In honor of Earth Day, let's do a recycling exercise. Yes, you've been diligent with the paper and plastic that piles up every week, but open the fridge and look inside. C'mon, stick your head in there so you can see what's lurking behind the pickle jar in the back.

You see possibilities, despite what your brain registers as a nascent science fair project. You see what dietitian Jackie Newgent calls "vintage cuisine" waiting to be morphed into something delicious. Once known as lowly leftovers, these disparate morsels are whispering "gazpacho" in your ear. They begin to shout "sandwich" and then scream "calzone."

This multilingual food is speaking your language if you care anything about the essence of Earth Day.

"There's a direct connection between preventing food waste and keeping our planet healthy," said Newgent, author of the "Big Green Cookbook." "The best way to look at it is as 'recycling' because that's what you're doing, and recycling is a key to reducing our overall carbon footprint."

As Newgent notes, it's not just wasting the food, although Americans do a good job of that: anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of all the food the nation produces is wasted. But when we allow good food to make penicillin in the fridge, we also are wasting trillions of liters of water that went into its production, plus untold dollars in energy and transportation used to get it to our plates. Not to mention all the methane it produces once in a landfill. Let's leave that to the cows.

This isn't a guilt trip, though. Leftovers are tasty. In just two pages of her book, Newgent describes how to turn pizza into an omelet, cooked vegetables into hummus, steak into canapés, cooked rice into a better burger, turkey into tacos and salad with dressing into "pesto."

"Some of my cookbook recipes came to fruition because I had extra savories and was looking for ways to use them," she said. "For people who don't want to have or don't enjoy working with leftover food, it may be best for them not to have anything left. I consider that 'green-sizing' food

from the get go. But there are always times that not all food is eaten, so it's beneficial to put that creativity cap on and learn to love those leftovers in your own clever way."

Everyone who cooks for the holidays has had practice. Think about what you've done with that extra ham from Easter, or the leftover turkey from Thanksgiving. Plenty of cooks deliberately make too much on those holidays just to have 'vintage cuisine' on hand.

"We've been known to make double-batches of everything (over the holidays) to make certain we have plenty of leftovers to work with," said Wona Miniati, the co-author of two cookbooks under the aegis of Trader Joes. "Every last bit gets used up since we use the bones to make huge and delicious pots of soup to freeze afterward."

As Miniati points out, soup may have been invented to make use of leftovers. So, if nothing else, dust off the old slow cooker and start throwing stuff in. Your pickles will thank you.

### **Keeping them safe**

Follow four guidelines from author Jackie Newgent to make sure leftovers are safe:

1. Refrigerate cooked perishable foods within two hours.
2. Label and date leftovers
3. When appropriate, reheat solids to 165 degrees and bring soups to a full boil.
4. When reheating in the microwave, loosely cover and let food stand for 5 minutes to let the heat distribute. Always use environmentally safe wrap.

**Omelet du jour** You can add nearly any leftover to an omelet, from plain vegetables or chicken to burritos and pizza. "Pizza is definitely a winner," Jackie Newgent said. Chop up a leftover pizza slice into bite-sized pieces and add to the omelet, or just scramble into organic eggs. Add flair by sprinkling extra oregano on the pizza omelet and topping a burrito omelet with salsa or guacamole.

—from The Big Green Cookbook

### **Easy tips for recycling leftovers**

**Soups:** Toss any green vegetables, meats, corn, grains or any other leftovers into a soup pot or slow cooker with some broth. Along the way, freeze small amounts of leftovers to include in soup later.

**Portable lunches:** Take a leftovers lunch to work in reusable containers to keep it green.

**Quesadillas and wraps:** Leftover chicken, beans, rice or grilled vegetables can breathe new life into a wrap or burrito.

Sandwiches: Don't forget the classic sandwiches made from meatloaf and leftover turkey. Most people love leftovers when they have a makeover.

Compost: Last but not least, consider a compost pile because you can't eat literally everything. Even apartment dwellers can take advantage with a small indoor device.

—from Wona Miniati and Deanna Gunn in "Cooking with All Things Trader Joes"

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