

Leftovers to make your mouth water

A hearty recipe for 'Day After Thanksgiving Turkey Casserole'

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

My friend Jay is a professional chef. He's the kindest man you'll ever meet, however when I'm in the kitchen with him, I feel a little nervous.

Even on my best days, my knife skills create a sense of high alert in the kitchen. Jay watches me cut vegetables like he's a meerkat scouting for imminent danger.

Jay and I both teach cooking classes at The Pantry in Seattle, which I'm convinced is sometimes shocking to him. We often joke that we should co-teach a class highlighting our culinary viewpoints. The working title of the class is "The South of France vs. The South." I'm a North Carolina native, to make it clear which part I am in that scenario.

The only matchup that I know I'd emerge victorious is the side dish battle. Specifically, gratin vs. casserole. Jay would top a nuanced French-style gratin with made

from scratch buttery breadcrumbs, and I'd top a squash casserole with crushed up Lay's Classic Potato Chips.

I like to imagine that upon seeing me open the bag of chips, Jay would quit on the spot, knowing he had been bested.

Casseroles are classic comfort food. Whether for bereavement or celebration, they are warming, economical and they freeze beautifully.

Casseroles are a national treasure for transforming Thanksgiving leftovers into something new. It reminds me of old NBC commercials before streaming platforms became dominant. Rerun shows during the summer were advertised as "If you haven't seen it, it's new to you." The same applies to next day Thanksgiving casserole. "If you transform it, it's new to you."

Call it a casserole or a gratin, but don't forget the crowning glory of crunchy topping. Use dressing (stuffing is cooked inside the bird, dressing is cooked outside the bird), Ritz Crackers, potato chips or buttery breadcrumbs. I remember one time my grandmother topped a casserole with Cheetos because that's all she had on hand.

That once-in-a-lifetime casserole is still my favorite. Both Jay and I would wear the silver medal with our heads held high against that one. Grandma wins the gold.

My casserole recipe uses leftover turkey and Ritz Crackers. Can you add potato chips? Absolutely! Feel free to throw in a cup of peas, green beans or leftover cooked broccoli to make this casserole your own.

Day After Thanksgiving Turkey Casserole

Serves 4 to 6 people

Ingredients:

- One sleeve of Ritz Crackers
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and divided in half
- One can condensed cream of chicken soup (I am not ashamed of this; you shouldn't be either!)
- 8 ounces sour cream
- 1/2 cup turkey or chicken broth, low sodium
- 1 1/2 pounds cooked and diced turkey
- 2 tablespoons of chopped fresh herbs (parsley, thyme, tarragon)



Brian Medford

Brian Meford's casserole is topped with a fresh sleeve of Ritz Crackers.

Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Lightly butter a 2-quart casserole dish with 2 tablespoons of melted butter.

In a bowl, combine the condensed soup, sour cream, broth, diced turkey and fresh herbs. This is where you can incorporate your vegetable additions.

Spoon the mixture in the bottom of the casserole dish.

Crush the sleeve of Ritz Crackers and toss them in a bowl with the remaining melted butter. Sprinkle the buttered cracker crumbs over the chicken mixture.

Bake for 35 to 45 minutes until hot and bubbly.

Brian Medford is the owner of Idlewild Biscuits and Bakes in Astoria. He teaches cooking classes at The Pantry in Seattle. Contact him at blmedford@gmail.com

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