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UTILIZATION OF LEFTOVERS

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Leftovers at home are generally saved to be eaten later. Leftover foods can be stored in airtight containers and refrigerated. Some of the leftover food can be eaten cold from the refrigerator, while other foods can be reheated in a microwave or mixed with other ingredients and re-cooked to make a new dish.

Instead of just throwing away leftover food, the best way to extract value from a meal is to utilize every bit of it. This not only helps to reduce waste but also helps to reduce the cost per meal. The only problem with this is that leftover food is not very tasty for the palate so it has to be efficiently reused.

Effective ways of reusing leftover food and beverages

Some of the ways by which left over food and beverages can be effectively reused is given below:

The following are some of the ways by which leftover beverages such as soda and mixers can be used:

- Leftover cola can be used in the preparation of barbecue sauce. A sweet, tangy barbecue sauce can be obtained after the cola and other ingredients are simmered together. This sauce will last for several months if stored in the refrigerator.
- Leftover dark sodas can be used in the preparation of thick and flavorful sauces.
- Leftover Sprite, 7 Up or some other brand of lemon-lime soda, can be used to make delicious, flaky biscuits. The clear, citrus soda adds flavor, lightness and mild sweetness to the biscuits.
- Citrus soda can be used to prevent fruits from browning reaction. Cut fruits can be soaked in the soda to maintain freshness in the preparation of fruit salad. However use of citrus soda will increase the sugar content of the fruit salad.
- Leftover coffee can be used instead of water in cake batter in preparing a cake, especially chocolate cake or brownies for a little added flavor.
- Leftover coffee can also be combined with milk, cream, eggs and sugar to make coffee ice-cream.

Leftover meat and poultry

- Left over carcass of chicken/beef/pork can be simmered with some vegetables to make chicken stock/beef stock/pork stock.
- Leftover chicken can be cut into small strips and served with lettuce, tomatoes, mayonnaise sauce, shredded cheese, salsa (a tomato-based spicy sauce) and tortillas (a thin, flat maize pancake, eaten hot or cold with a savoury filling) to make tasty wraps.

- The leftover meat loaf can be cut into small cubes and to this a can of tomato sauce, little basil and oregano can be added and then allowed to simmer. Some boiled pasta can be added to this mixture.

Leftover fruits and vegetables

- Leftover pulp after the preparation of fresh juices can be combined with water, cinnamon and ginger, simmered and strained to make a healthy, flavorful fruit tea.
- Leftover pulp of fruit juices can be added in baking of muffins, cakes and cookies for added texture and flavor.
- Leftover citrus peel scraps can be used to season stews and tomato sauces.
- Leftover pulp of vegetables can be baked to make veggie crackers.
- Leftover bits of chopped vegetables can be simmered to make vegetable stock.
- Leftover mashed potatoes can be frozen in small amounts in paper bags and can be used in recipes instead of flour. In any recipe one part mashed potatoes can be used with two parts flour.
- Leftover fruits can be put in a blender with some soy milk, peanut butter and made into exceptional smoothies. A smoothie is a thick smooth drink consisting of fresh fruit pureed with ice cream or yoghurt or milk

Leftover rice

- The leftover rice can be mixed with pancake batter to make pancakes. A pancake is a thin, flat cake of batter, fried on both sides in a pan and rolled up with a sweet or savoury filling

Leftover foods to be re-used in a buffet

All hotels should calculate the requirements for the day. Three months after beginning operations, a hotel can experiment by the addition of one kilo to the quantity ordered of each food item till an optimum level is reached. Any other perishable product is ordered according to need. In case 20 chickens are marinated and 14-15 are sold, the rest can be sent to the Quick Service Restaurant where rolls, kebabs and sandwiches will be served between 7 pm and 8 pm.

Leftovers and Food Safety

Food should be cooked to a safe temperature and the leftovers should be refrigerated promptly in order to ensure that leftovers are safe to eat. The two main causes of food borne illness are not cooking food to a safe temperature and leaving food out at an unsafe temperature. Leftovers should be handled safely in order to reduce food borne illness. Some of the points to be noted in handling leftovers and food safety:

Food should be cooked safely

The first step in having safe leftovers is cooking the food safely. A food thermometer should be used to ensure that the food is cooked to a safe, minimum internal temperature.

Red meats: Raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops and roasts should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145° F. The temperature should be measured with a food thermometer before removing the meat from heat. For safety and quality, meat should be allowed to rest for at least three minutes before being carved or consumed.

Ground meats: Raw ground beef, pork, lamb and veal should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160° F.

Poultry: Poultry should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165° F.

Food should be kept out of the Danger Zone

The ideal temperature for bacterial growth is between 40° F and 140° F. Once food is safely cooked, hot food must be kept hot at 140° F to prevent bacterial growth. Leftovers must be refrigerated within 2 hours of cooking the food. All perishable foods that have been left at room temperature for more than 2 hours should be discarded. When food is served at a buffet, hot foods should be kept hot in chafing dishes and cold foods in bowls of ice. Cold leftovers that have been left out for more than 2 hours at room temperature should be discarded.

Food should be cooled rapidly

After cooking it is important to cool food rapidly to a temperature of 40° F or below in order to prevent growth of bacteria. This can be done by dividing large amounts of food into small portions and placing in shallow containers. Similarly large items of food like whole roasts or hams can be cut or sliced into smaller portions to cool. Hot foods can be rapidly chilled in an ice or cold water bath and then refrigerated.

Leftover foods should be wrapped well

Leftover foods should be wrapped in airtight packaging or sealed in storage containers. This helps to prevent bacterial growth, helps to retain moisture and also helps to prevent leftovers from picking up odors from other foods in the refrigerator. The wrapped leftover foods should be refrigerated or frozen immediately for rapid cooling.

Leftovers should be stored safely

Leftovers can be stored in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days or in the freezer for 3 to 4 months. However frozen leftover foods can lose moisture and flavor when stored for longer period of time.

Frozen leftovers should be thawed safely

Leftovers can be thawed safely by three ways- in the refrigerator, using cold water or in the microwave oven.

The longest time taken to thaw is in the refrigerator but the leftovers stay safe the entire time. After thawing, the food should be used within 3 to 4 days or can be refrozen. The frozen leftovers must be kept in a leak-proof package or plastic bag. In case there is leakage of the bag, water can get into the food and bacteria from the air could enter it.

Leftovers should not be reheated without thawing

Frozen leftover foods can be safely reheated without thawing, in a saucepan or oven or microwave. However the time taken for reheating the food will be longer than if the food is thawed first.

Leftovers should be reheated safely

Leftover foods when reheated should reach 165° F as measured with a food thermometer. Sauces, soups and gravies should be reheated by bringing them to a rolling boil. Leftovers should be covered while reheating. This helps to retain moisture and ensures that food will heat all the way through.

When food is reheated in the microwave, it should be covered and rotated for even heating. The food items should be arranged evenly in a covered glass or ceramic dish and some liquid can be added if required. The moist heat that is created will help to destroy harmful bacteria and will ensure that the food is cooked evenly.

Refreezing Previously Frozen Leftovers

Sometimes there are leftover "leftovers." The food remaining after reheating to a temperature of 165° F can be refrozen safely. In case only a portion of the frozen leftover food is required, the entire food can be thawed in the refrigerator and the required portion can be removed and the rest be refrozen without reheating.