**Ah, those leftovers!**

Are you being plagued by leftovers today? It’s true leftovers from a holiday meal are almost always better than the meal itself. Just try to prove me wrong. Shame on those humans who refuse to eat leftovers! I’ve heard of individuals who would rather go out to MacDonald’s instead of eat holiday leftovers. That’s just wrong!

I’ll admit, I had a daughter who would tell me that ‘she wasn’t feeling it’ when I suggested leftovers in the refrigerator. She rarely ate leftovers while in high school. Funny how she grew up to cook specifically so that she had plenty of leftovers in the refrigerator for the week, while she was in college. I knew she’d smarten up.

According to an article written by Bryn Mooth, “Don’t throw that away! Ten creative ways to use leftovers,” (Sustainable America Newsletter, 11/25/19); the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations says that roughly 70 billion pounds of food is lost in the United States each year and nearly one-third of that food waste happens because we purchase, cook or serve more than we consume.

A survey from Glad found that nearly half of Americans have found an item in their fridge in the past month that they didn’t realize was there; something tucked way back in the back of the refrigerator, in a container that was stashed weeks ago. Disliked? Forgotten? Overlooked?

There is absolutely nothing wrong with trying to be better with leftovers and what better time than after huge holiday meals.

Create leftovers purposefully. Think about what extras can become. Extra vegetables could be the starting point of a soup or pasta dish. Leftover proteins can be used for sandwiches.

Store leftovers smartly. Glass storage containers are not only reusable, they allow you to see what’s inside. Use zip-top gallon bags to freeze your leftovers. Make sure to label and date the contents on a piece of tape.

Dedicate a leftovers night. Maybe in a day or two or even one night a week, commit to eating “down” the fridge.

Turn dinner leftovers into lunch. Store lunch sized portions of your dinner in a container and pack it for lunch tomorrow. With a bit of planning and not much extra effort, you could create a week’s worth of healthful, homemade take-it-to-work lunches.

Think “ingredients,” not “leftovers.” Examples; turn extra pasta or cooked vegetables into a frittata, or a pasta sauce, baked pasta. Burritos with leftover rice, vegetables, proteins and freshen it up with salsa and sour cream.

Make a soup. Simply taking many of your leftovers with an added broth and seasonings can be the bomb. Freshen it up with fresh bread!

Salvage stale bread. Do as the Italians do; after a day or two when the bread loses it’s freshness, halve the loaf crosswise, drizzle it with good olive oil and rub it with the cut side of a halved ripe tomato. Add seasonings and bake until warm! Yum!

Save vegetable scraps to make stock. In a freezer bag add trimmings of carrots, fennel, onions, leeks, tomatoes, stems of herbs and greens, corn cobs and whatever else. When the bag is full, defrost the contents and boil for two hours. Strain the substance and you’ll be left with a better-than-store-bought veggie stock that can be frozen and used when needed.

Create some fun “kitchen sink” meals. Use those extra cooked vegetables, bits of cheese, cooked proteins in a salad with your favorite dressing or a stir fry.

Portion and store. So many meals come in extra-large sizes. Separate the meal or the food item into usable portions that fit your dining size and freeze separately. Now you can pull out what you need, want and be prepared.

Be careful! Like any large prepared holiday meal, the calories continue to remain in those delicious leftovers the next time you eat it. Another unfortunate truth is that we often are not as thoughtful when grabbing the Tupperware with the favorite leftover dish. Might as well finish it, right? So, overeating is a temptation.

Be prepare those leftovers well. Be thoughtful in how, where and when you eat them. Enjoy them with all the enthusiasm of their first appearance before they became leftovers!