

## Leftover Makeovers and Refrigerator Reboots!

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Got some leftovers languishing in your refrigerator? Or perhaps little bits of foods that are almost past prime time to eat. Read on if their next stop is likely to be the trash can.

Give new life to still edible foods with our gallery of delicious ideas. As a general rule, use leftovers within 3–4 days.

### 90 Billion Pounds of Wasted Food

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates about 90 billion pounds of edible food goes uneaten each year in homes and away-from-home eating places. This is equal to 123 times the weight of the Empire State Building and costs consumers about **\$370 per person** each year.

Here's the breakdown from USDA on how much food is wasted from each food grouping per person yearly:

- Grains: \$22
- Fruits: \$45
- Protein Foods (meat, poultry, fish, eggs and nuts): \$140
- Vegetables: \$66
- Dairy: \$60
- Added Fat & Sugar: \$37

### Meat, Vegetables, Pasta



Search your fridge for foods that can be combined into a soup. Add extra cooked pasta or rice at the end, so it heats through but doesn't become mushy from overcooking. Keep some chicken stock or canned, diced tomatoes on-hand for a quick soup base.

### Bread



Transform slightly dried-out bread into croutons: Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly brush top side of bread with olive oil. If desired, sprinkle with Italian seasoning. Cut into 1/2- to 3/4-inch cubes, leaving the crusts on. Spread in a single layer on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake on middle shelf of the oven for 5–10 minutes or until lightly browned and crisp. No need to turn croutons during baking.

### Cheese



Use up those odds and ends of harder cheeses by shredding them with a grater or in a food processor. Check your refrigerator for other ingredients to include such as olives, pickles, pimientos, walnuts, red or green peppers, etc.; add low-fat mayonnaise to bind ingredients and use as a sandwich spread.

### Fruit, Yogurt



Chop and combine those last pieces of fruit. Flavored or plain yogurt — perhaps sweetened with a little honey and a splash of vanilla — makes a tasty dressing. Other possible add-ins include the remainder of that package of nuts and those final bits of dried fruit.

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## Eggs



A general guideline is to use eggs within 3–5 weeks after purchasing them for best quality. Gain extra storage time

by boiling the eggs. Hard-cooked eggs, will keep in their shell for 7 days in a clean covered container in the fridge. They make a quick high quality protein source for a meal such as in main dish salads and sandwiches.

## Assorted Produce

Toss assorted bits and pieces of produce lingering in the refrigerator and on your kitchen counter into a salad. Add the last of that bag of soon-to-be-limp lettuce; wedges cut from an almost overly ripe tomato and strips from that remaining half a pepper. Do



something “grate” and grate in some cabbage and carrots; while you’re at it, add some grated cheese. Mix in some leftover chicken chunks or add a can of tuna, and you’ll have a bountiful main dish salad!

## CLEAN OUT THE FRIDGE AND CUPBOARDS CASSEROLE

(Makes 6 servings)

Make your own casserole from what’s on-hand using these basic ingredients. Select food(s) from each category or use your own favorites.

### Starch — select ONE:

- 2 cups uncooked pasta (macaroni, penne, spiral, bow tie), **COOKED**
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain white or brown rice, **COOKED**
- 4 cups uncooked noodles, **COOKED**

### Protein — select ONE:

- 2 cups cooked ground beef
- 2 cups cooked and diced chicken, turkey, ham, beef or pork
- 2 cups chopped hard-cooked egg
- 2 cans (6–8 ounce) fish or seafood, flaked
- 2 cups cooked or canned dry beans (kidney, etc.)

### Vegetable — select ONE:

- 1 package (10 ounce) thawed and drained frozen spinach, broccoli, green beans, green peas
- 1 can (16 ounce) green beans, peas, carrots, corn, drained
- 2 cups sliced fresh zucchini

### Sauce — select ONE:

- 2 cups white sauce or 1 can sauce-type soup (mushroom, celery, cheese, tomato, etc.) mixed with milk to make 2 cups
- 1 can (16 ounce) diced tomatoes with juice

### Flavor — select ONE or MORE:

- 1/2 cup chopped celery, 1/4 cup chopped onion, 1/4 cup sliced black olives
- 1–2 teaspoons mixed dried leaf herbs (basil, thyme, marjoram, tarragon)
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Topping — select ONE or MORE (if desired after heating, place on top):

- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup shredded Swiss, Cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese
- 1/4 cup buttered bread crumbs
- 1/4–1/2 cup canned fried onion rings

Combine in a buttered 2 to 2-1/2 quart casserole dish. Cover and bake at 350°F for about 50 minutes to 1 hour or microwave using 50% power for about 15–30 minutes, rotating or stirring as necessary. Heat until steaming hot (165°F) throughout. Return casserole with topping(s), uncovered, to oven for about 10 minutes or to microwave for about 2 minutes.