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50% Less Cooking

By Linda Gray

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without hitting the fast food button! Don't you just cringe when some clever kitchen type tells you what you could be doing with the leftovers in the fridge, when it's plainly obvious the leftovers will stay there until they walk out by themselves!

More often than not, saving money with leftovers, although a great idea, takes a lot of time in preparation and relies on many other ingredients being available. So.....

Design your own leftovers!

Cooking twice as much as you need 'by design' allows you the extra time tomorrow with the added bonus of knowing what you're going to cook.

Dithering around in the kitchen working out who wants what and what you forgot to buy, takes ages. If you know you've already got a portion of the evening meal ready in the fridge, life becomes a lot less stressful.

Most 'in-the-pot' dishes like bolognese, chile, casseroles and stews can all be made in double quantities in very little extra time. Make sure you thoroughly reheat meat dishes until very hot. The only real problem with in the pot recipes is that you're obliged to eat the same meal two nights in a row. Although you can serve it with rice, pasta, or potatoes to add some variety.

If you've managed to cook enough rice to feed the neighborhood, don't throw away the leftovers. Let the rice cool completely, place in a bowl, cover with plastic food wrap, and refrigerate. Then the following evening you have a base for a new and exciting meal...try these ideas:

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Egg Fried Rice: Make a plain omelette and remove from pan. Cut into small pieces and set aside.. Put cold leftover rice in the pan and stir gently. Add omelette pieces, stir and heat until hot right through. Serve with Chinese style ribs, or veggie sausages.

Special Fried Rice: Fry in olive or nut oil a finely chopped onion, tomato, green pepper and a few sliced mushrooms. Add leftover rice to pan. Stir gently. Add sweetcorn for colour and a few chopped walnuts if liked. Serve with any meat, fish, egg or veggie dish.

Rice Salad: In a large bowl, mix leftover rice with fresh raw chopped vegetables; onion, tomato, sweet pepper, celery, sweetcorn, and any other favorites hanging around in the fridge. Chill for half an hour before serving. A half mayo–half natural yogurt dressing can be gently stirred in if liked. To create a whole summer meal in a bowl, add chopped boiled egg, cooked flaked fish, pieces of ham or cooked chicken or even nuts and raisins!

Potatoes can easily be turned into 'designer leftovers'

Cooking a whole tray of jacket potatoes will take no longer than cooking one or two, just a few extra minutes scrubbing time needed. Store leftovers in the fridge.

Flat Fries: Slice and shallow fry leftover jackets in hot olive oil and some mixed dried herbs or cumin spice. Turn occasionally. Serve hot with anything.

Family Omelette: Peel and dice leftover jackets and gently fry in olive oil, with a chopped onion. Pour over beaten eggs and add some grated cheese. Cook gently for a few minutes. Turn and cook the other side. The omelette will probably fall apart during this manoeuvre. Just push it back together. No–one will know! Serve hot with a green salad.

Rough Potato Salad: Peel leftover jackets and chop roughly. Mix in a large bowl with sweetcorn, tuna and a little chopped onion or chives. Serve with a mayonnaise sauce.

Hot mashed potato, served with a delicious gravy, is always a family favorite. Make twice as much and delight the family two days in a row! Cool the leftover mash thoroughly. Place in a bowl, cover with plastic food wrap and refrigerate.

Baked Mash: Put leftover mash into a large bowl and stir in cooked flaked white fish, bacon pieces, or cooked vegetables. Place in a greased ovenproof dish, top with grated cheese and bake in a medium oven until hot right through.

Burger Mash: In a large bowl, mix leftover mash with a little beaten egg, some chopped chives or very finely chopped onion. Then form small balls in your hands. Flatten slightly and, if available, coat with breadcrumbs or chopped nuts. Fry as you would a burger!

Cottage Pie: Cook minced beef, or veggie equivalent, a chopped onion and a tin of tomatoes together and place mixture in a large lightly greased ovenproof dish. Spoon leftover mashed potato over the top, and sprinkle on a little grated cheese, if liked. Heat through thoroughly in a medium to hot oven and

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serve hot with green vegetables.

Cook a slightly larger chicken and keep the leftovers covered – and maybe hidden – in the fridge. A vegetarian equivalent of chicken will work equally well with these dishes.

Quick Chicken Curry: Pour a home made curry sauce or a jar of ready – made over cut up leftover chicken pieces and heat through thoroughly in a hot oven. Always make sure re–heated meat is steaming hot right through. Serve with rice or jacket potatoes.

Chicken Salad: Mix cold leftover chicken with a finely chopped onion and stir in a half mayo, half natural yogurt dressing. Add a few walnuts for an extra special treat. Chill for 30 minutes and serve with any dish..

Chicken Stir Fry: Put cut up chicken pieces in a frying pan with a little olive or nut oil. Mix in thinly sliced sweet peppers, onion, tomato and any other bits in the fridge that look healthy enough to eat. Cook gently for a few minutes, ensuring the chicken is thoroughly hot. Then mix into a bowl of hot cooked noodles. Serve with an oriental style sauce.

Hot Tip: Planning a few menus in advance will mean you are always in control of nourishing and tasty meals, and no need to lean guiltily on the microwave waiting for the latest TV dinner to cook!

Linda Gray is a freelance writer based in a log cabin in a wood. See what else goes on between the trees over at

. Drop in anytime!

What To Look For In Cooking Schools

By Linda Emerson

As they say, the greatest way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Is it any wonder why most women painstakingly toil and learn the art of cooking? Hence, most people who know how to cook would normally teach the others who do not know. They started having some sessions with every dish being taught every time the supposed to be teacher to his or her supposed to be student. As the time went by, this kind of teaching the others how to cook had been an invigorating activity. And so, gradually cooking schools were built, maybe with those who first taught cooking.

I. Culinary Schools – A Brief Rundown

Since its inception and practice, cooking schools had continuously provided their students, first, with the basics of cooking. Thereafter, they advanced to the next level until their students had the confidence to progress their learning on their own. The first sessions of classes in cooking schools before are not as organized as it is today. Nevertheless, the growth of the cooking schools can be traced back to the very first informal session they had before. Since then, cooking schools gradually

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develop into a more organized way of teaching somebody how to cook.

II. Choices

The problem is too many cooking schools. As a potential student, of course you will want to attend the very best learning institution that you can.

1. Is it accredited? In most instances, it always takes a certificate in order to prove one's worth to an employer. In this case, a good cooking school should be accredited, and not just by so-and-so company but a valid accrediting agency. From its accreditation, you can now tell its length of service in the business. So those who have been in the business for at least 6 years are good enough, right?

2. Do you need a job right away after your training? If so, then it's best to choose cooking schools that can give you career advancement right after your training. Good cooking schools require their students to have on-the-job-training within restaurants and hotels. In turn, it will be good exposure for you especially if you want to work for them in the future.

3. Are you particular with the student-teacher ratio? If so, then choose a cooking school that offers at least a maximum of 15 students per instructor. This is to facilitate ease of teaching and improve better comprehension among the students. A smaller class size is better especially if the session includes mostly of a one-on-one approach.

4. Do you have a tight budget? Normally, good cooking schools cost a lot more than the typical cooking schools. So, if you are really determined to start your cooking lessons, it's a must that you have the budget for it. Otherwise, you might just end up with a cheap one but cannot give you the right techniques as far as cooking is concerned.

5. You need a good instructor for a good cooking school, right?

That is, if you really want to know how to cook effectively and professionally. So, it's best that you

check on the background of the instructors in the cooking school that you chose to enrol with. Find some helpful information if they are good enough teach you the art of cooking.

6. Proximity Can you endure a long ride going to the cooking school? If not, then it's best that you choose a good cooking school that is located within your locality. This will give you a shorter time for commuting.

7. Is it private or a public? If you go for public cooking schools, you might save a hefty amount of money because they are cost cheaper than the private ones. But then again, the quality of the school facilities and instruction may suffer because the government may not have allotted a budget for the school.

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