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FOOD

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Hurrah for leftovers

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Back when we were in the military and of substantially less financial means, my husband used to say our meals were so much better near the end of a pay period because, when the fridge was getting bare, I took extra time to try to make something really tasty out of the leftovers.

Leftovers should get a lot more credit than they do. In both World Wars, they were actually one focus of the government's efforts to lead America to victory.

The U.S. Food Administration

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Herbert Hoover to a new government department known as the Food Administration, whose motto was "Food Will Win The War." At the time, the new agency's primary purpose was to arrange provisions for both World War I troops and the population of western Europe, which had been devastated by war-induced famine.

Part of the plan included stabilizing grain prices, as well as teaching American civilians how to conserve their own food resources. During the first World War, conservation efforts were highly successful, resulting in Americans using 15 percent less food without initiating any rationing. By cutting back and utilizing leftovers, America was able to provide 18,500,000 tons of food to the starving allies in a single year. In that sense, food really did win the war.

When World War II struck, the Food Administration geared up its program again, encouraging citizens to grow their own "Victory" gardens as their part of the war effort. Posters, newsreels and menus for "Wheatless" and "Meatless" days were published, as well as entire war time cookbooks. American families received ration cards and tokens to purchase limited amounts of certain items, including sugar, gasoline, meat and butter.

The Miracle Of Leftovers

For most of World War II, my father was an airman stationed in England. While times were tough here in the States, the populace of some European nations and Great Britain were facing near starvation. Wheat — at that time the primary staple of both the British and American diets — was largely imported but became increasingly more difficult for the Britain to obtain until finally, in 1942, the government developed a type of bread that became known as the National loaf.

This thriffter type of bread was made out of whole wheat — the husk and bran included. Although now it would be considered a healthy choice, by World War II standards this coarse, fibrous bread was only made palatable by the realization that starvation was the alternative. Some claim that toward the end of the war wheat and other grain stalks were ground into meal for bread, as well.

Despite the often short supplies, an all out effort was being made to keep the American troops and their allies as well fed as possible; my father claimed that when not in the field, they did eat comparatively well. However, having experienced need firsthand during the Depression, many service members, my father included, were greatly perturbed that the civilian population around them was barely surviving.

In response to their concern, my father and a buddy devised a plan in hopes of helping as many British civilians as they could. Though it was against regulations to do anything with leftover food other than dispose of it, they talked the camp cook into arranging for any edible food to be placed on

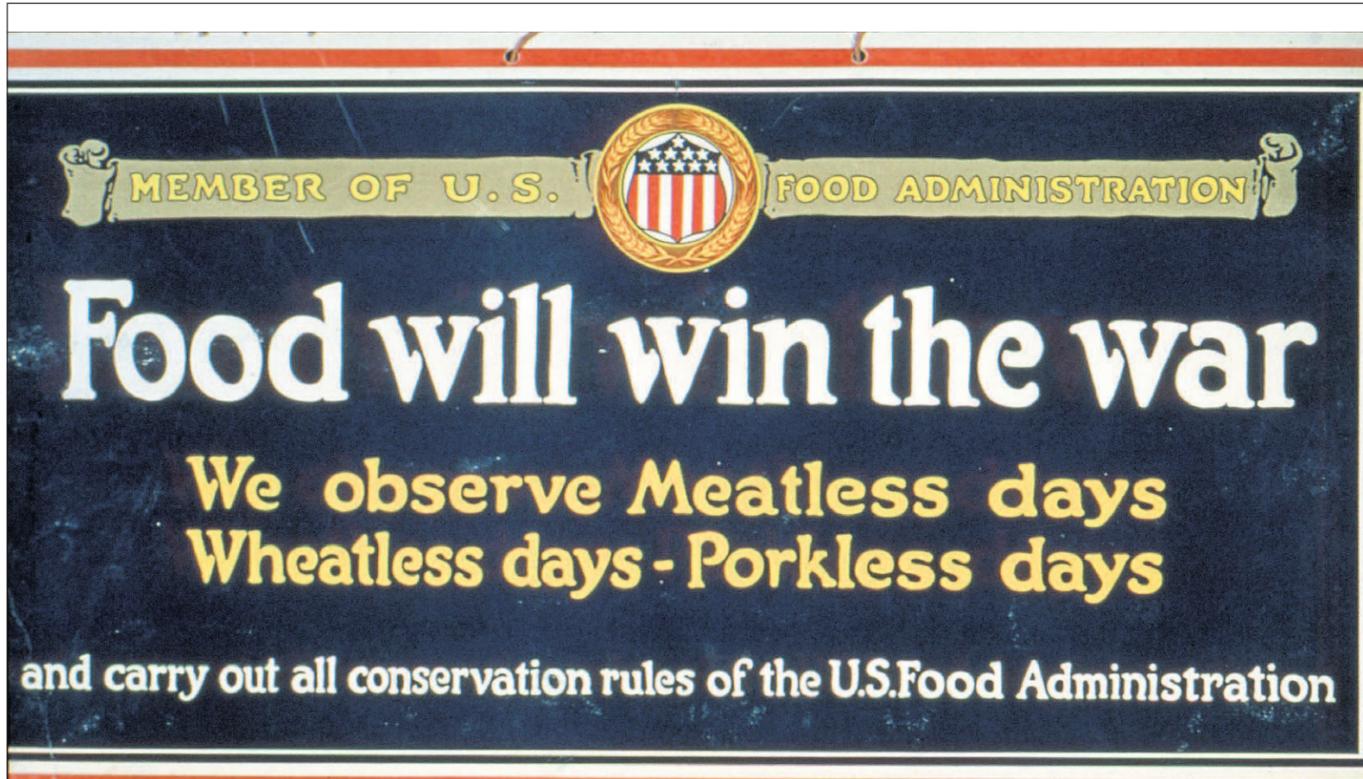


Photo from Credit Food Administration, National Archives

During both World Wars, conserving food was a focus on the home front.

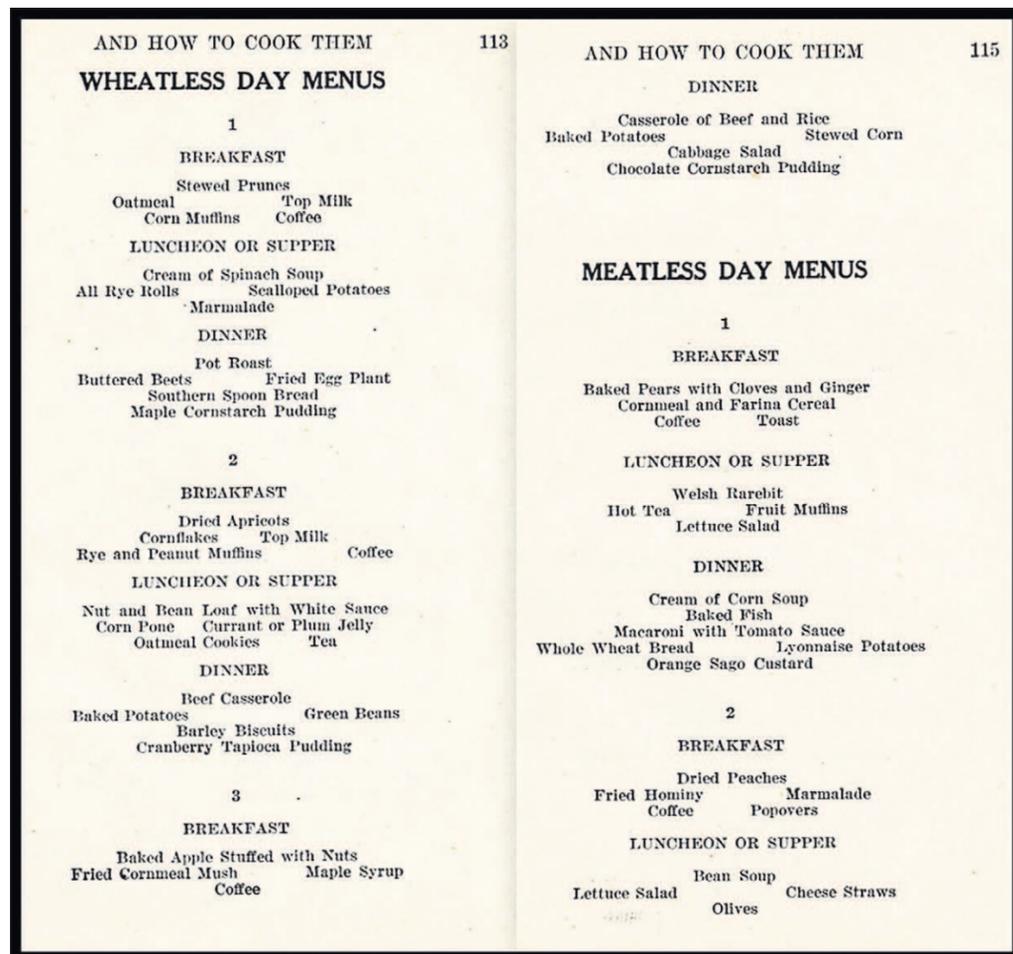


Photo from the Houston Goudiss and Alberta Goodiss, NY, NY, 1918

During WWI, "Meatless" and "Wheatless" days prompted the Food Administration to create menus to help homemakers make due with less.

the very top of the trash bins on trays. Nearly everyone was willing to participate in the subterfuge. Somehow, a Jeep was mysteriously made available at just the right time every day.

As often as they could, my father and his friend would pick up the carefully laid aside food, usually still warm, load it up in the Jeep and head out into the countryside. They handed out food to as many families as they could, rotating their course far and wide.

There was only one problem. The local families were so malnourished that their bodies could not process the comparative richness of the typical airman's diet. The kindness of these sincere American soldiers was making the English civilians ill, resulting in them becoming even weaker than they would have been without the illicit charity.

In response, the handouts were curtailed, with lesser amounts of food given to each family so that their digestive systems could readjust to what would have, in other circumstances, been considered a normal diet. My father and his band of soft-hearted warriors continued their charitable giving for the rest of the war in Europe.

The Recipes

With a little planning, you can make use of extra turkey,



Laura Hunt Angel photo

With tasty fixings like Tortilla Soup and Pecan Pie Shots, no one will know you are serving Thanksgiving leftovers.

vegetables and even dessert without anyone knowing that they are eating leftovers. The following guest-worthy recipes might make you consider having leftovers more often.

Turkey Tortilla Soup

This zesty, comforting soup is so easy to prepare that every time I make it I get the feeling I've forgotten something. It calls for canned tomatoes with jalapenos, such as Rotel brand, so you can adjust the spice level by using mild, regular or hot. I prefer the cilantro and lime variety.

2 cups leftover turkey, shredded
1 32-oz carton chicken stock (or homemade turkey stock)
1 10-oz can diced tomatoes with jalapenos

1/2 cup rice
1-2 tablespoons lime juice, optional
2 tablespoons dried cilantro
Toppings: tortilla chips, shredded cheese, avocado, etc.

Place all ingredients except for the toppings in a kettle. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, 20-25 minutes, or until the rice is tender. Alternatively, place in a slow cooker and cook about 6 hours. Top individual servings with crushed tortilla chips, shredded cheese, cubed avocado or other favorite Tex-Mex toppings. Serves 6-8.

Stuffed Sweet Potatoes

These sweet and savory potatoes are packed with so many Thanksgiving must-haves that you may want to serve them the day of the big meal instead

of as a leftover dish.

4 large sweet potatoes
Oil for rubbing potatoes
1/4 cup packed brown sugar (or substitute)
4 tablespoons butter, divided
Leftover dressing, about 2 cups
1/2 cup dried cranberries

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F; spray a baking sheet with non stick spray.

Rub each potato with a thin coating of oil. Place on baking sheet and bake about 1 hour, or until the potatoes can be easily pierced. Remove them from the oven to cool slightly.

Cut the potatoes into halves and scoop out the inside but leave about a half inch of potato all around. Heat the dressing in the microwave just until warm. Combine the potato filling with 2 tablespoons of butter and the brown sugar, then lightly toss together the potatoes, dressing and cranberries.

Fill each of the potato halves with the potato-dressing mixture, top with remaining butter, then return to the oven and bake at 350 degrees F for 15-20 minutes or until heated through. Serves 8. TIP: Make the potatoes ahead of time and refrigerate. Before serving, bake covered at 350 degrees F for about 25 minutes or until heated though.

Quick Kentucky Hot Brown

Chef Fred Schmidt, of The Brown Hotel in Louisville, invented the original Hot Brown Sandwich from leftovers for hungry late night guests; its use of turkey makes it a natural for Thanksgiving weekend. Schmidt's first Hot Brown sandwich was topped with a creamy white Parmesan cheese sauce, but since then cheddar cheese sauce has become just as common. This less fancy version uses pre-cooked bacon and Alfredo sauce from a jar. Feel free to use canned cheddar cheese sauce, if you prefer.

For each sandwich:

1 slice Texas toast
2-3 slices turkey breast
2 thick slices tomato
2 slices pre-cooked bacon
1/2 cup Alfredo sauce
Grated Parmesan cheese

Toast the bread and remove the crust, if desired. Place toast on an ovenproof dish and top with the turkey. Place the tomato slices alongside the toast and cover all with cheese sauce. Top with 2 slices of pre-cooked bacon and a sprinkle of grated cheese. Broil 6-8" from heat until cheese sauce is bubbly and bacon is crisp.

Pecan Pie Dessert Shots

This is a dressy way to stretch a couple of leftover pieces of pie into small, elegant desserts for unexpected guests. You will need 6-8 shot glasses or small, demi-tasse cups.

2 medium slices leftover pecan pie
Caramel ice cream topping
Whipped cream

Cut the pie into roughly 1-inch pieces. Tuck a cube or 2 of pie into each small glass, then add a drizzle of caramel. Make 2 layers if you wish, then top with whipped cream. Makes 6-8 dessert shots.