

CHRISTMAS LEFTOVERS

Much as I love Christmas dinner, one of my favorite things about the holiday season is the leftovers. For years, when my father was still alive, we always had roast beef. Now, don't get me wrong—roast beef is one of the best things there is. But I really loved the hash that my mom used to make from the leftovers. It's really not hard to do.

Peel and dice an onion into pieces no larger than your little fingernail. Peel and cut up a potato into small pieces, about the same size. Put the diced potato into a microwave-safe bowl with about a teaspoon of water and microwave on high for a couple of minutes until the potato is cooked. Or you can drop the potato into some boiling water and boil it for about 5 minutes. Drain the potato.

In a large skillet, melt a couple of tablespoons of butter over medium heat. When hot, add the onion and sauté for a couple of minutes until softened. Add the potato, and about a cup and a half of left-over roast beef, cut into cubes about the same size. Add a couple of tablespoons of leftover gravy, a pinch of thyme and a couple of tablespoons of heavy cream. Some cooks add a splash of sherry.

Cook over medium heat until a crust forms, then turn it over with a spatula and continue to cook the hash, stirring from time to time to let the hash brown throughout. The hash will need about a half hour total cooking time. Shortly before the hash is done, pat it down with a spatula to form an unbroken cake. All you need is a green salad for a delicious supper. And yes, it's alright to put a little ketchup on your hash.

I had roast lamb this Christmas, so I made a cousin of hash, called shepherd's pie. Dump an 8-ounce package of sliced mushrooms into your food processor and process until very finely chopped. Then put a tablespoon of oil into a frying pan and cook the mushrooms over medium to medium-low heat, stirring from time to time until they release all their juices and are completely cooked, about 20-30 minutes. The finely chopped and cooked mushrooms are what the French call a mushroom duxelle.

While the mushrooms are cooking, peel and finely chop a medium onion, a carrot, and a stalk of celery. The French call this mixture of finely chopped onion, carrot, and celery a mirepoix. In another skillet, heat a couple of tablespoons of vegetable oil, over medium-low heat and cook the chopped onion, carrot and celery until they are softened, about 15 minutes. Add about a pound of leftover cooked lamb, also finely chopped, and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring to brown evenly. Stir in the mushroom duxelle.

Stir in a tablespoon of all-purpose flour, and continue to cook for another couple of minutes. Then add about half a teaspoon of dried thyme, a couple of shakes of Worcestershire sauce, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of beef stock or leftover gravy, a pinch of ground nutmeg, and a little salt and some freshly ground black pepper. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until thickened slightly, about 5 minutes.

Put the meat mixture into a baking dish and top with leftover mashed potatoes. Scatter over the top about 2 tablespoons of butter, cut into little pieces. Bake in a preheated 400 degree oven for about half an hour, until the potatoes are browned and the dish is heated through. Let it cool slightly, and then serve directly from the baking dish.

By the way, if you make this same dish with leftover beef instead of lamb, it's called cottage pie. Both shepherd's pie and cottage pie are some of the best examples there are of really good English cooking.

I know this seems like a lot of work to use up leftovers, but the results are spectacular. A good full-bodied ale or amber beer are wonderful accompaniments to either hash or shepherd's pie.

New Years Day is Tuesday, and I'll be having my family's traditional black-eyed peas and ham hocks. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen, wishing you all a safe and sane New Year's Eve and a wonderful New Year.