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How big was your Thanksgiving turkey? I am always impressed and a bit amazed by people who cook mega turkeys – 25 or 30 pounds. I guess one of these monsters would fit in my oven, but I'm not sure I could lift it. And the leftovers must last for weeks.

Growing up when we weren't skiing or on the beach, our family had traditional Sunday dinners. Those Sunday feasts were a small celebration of family; a mini Thanksgiving on a dreary April day. And more often than not, a roast was the centerpiece of the dinner and the table; roast beef, a roast leg of lamb, a roast chicken or a pork roast. And those roasts were handy for leftovers later in the week. If memory serves, those Sunday dinners were generally good for at least two leftover nights.

As 6 o'clock approached we would begin to pester our Mom, "What's for dinner?" And on leftover nights, the answer was more often than not "Mrs. Slusser's Delight". For many years, I assumed that Mrs. Slusser was a mythical character like Betty Crocker or Duncan Hines developed by my Mom to sell leftovers. Without a Madison Avenue campaign to cast her, I always imagined Mrs. Slusser as a middle aged woman, tall and heavy set, wearing a flowered house dress and an apron. More Ethel than Lucy, but humorless, the Mrs. Slusser of my imagination was not a gourmet chef. Mrs. Slusser's delightful concoctions were what ever could be found in the refrigerator plus a dollop of sour cream and a splash of wine. Rice or noodles were added to stretch the roast beast for one more meal. Imagine my surprise when I recently learned that there really was a Mrs. Slusser. She was the grandmother of Dink Slusser, one of my Dad's fraternity brothers at MIT. After every vacation Dink would return to Cambridge loaded down with bags of leftovers from his Grandma S. Dink and friends would throw everything together and call it dinner if not delightful.



I rarely marry leftovers with a little sour cream and wine; my leftovers tend to find their way into dishes with an Asian or Latin twist. Lamb becomes a spicy Vindaloo curry. Steak meets a medley of crispy vegetables to become a Beef Thai salad. And more often than not, any bird finds its way into the soup pot. After the traditional New England fare on Thursday, I want some spice in my turkey soup. While I stick with simple fall vegetables, the secret to my soup is lots of garlic, some jalapeno, cilantro and Chinese noodles.

For my Thanksgiving dinner, I keep the turkey relatively small, just enough for the feast, and maybe a couple of sandwiches and dinner on Friday. By Saturday morning, Sunday at the latest, the bird is swimming in my soup pot. What's your idea of the ideal size for a Thanksgiving turkey? I guess it all depends on the size of your oven, the size of your party – and how many of Mrs. Slusser's delightful recipes you have collected.

Bon appétit! –

Susan

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Spicy Turkey Noodle Soup

My sister Brenda introduced me to the idea of spicing up a simple chicken or turkey soup with chilies and garlic. Once I tried it, I was hooked.

- 1 tablespoon butter or olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 leeks, chopped
- 4 carrots, chopped
- 4 celery stalks, chopped
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon jalapeño pepper, minced
- ¼ teaspoon dried chilies
- 12 cups turkey (or chicken) stock (recipe follows or store bought stock is ok when don't have a leftover turkey handy.)
- 2 cups cooked turkey (or chicken) in bite size pieces
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 6 ounces Chinese noodles
- Garnish: ½ cup cilantro, chopped (optional)

1. Put the butter or oil in a soup kettle. Add the onion, garlic, jalapeño and chilies and cook over low heat for 10 minutes. Add the leeks, carrots and celery and cook for an additional 5 minutes.
2. Increase the heat to medium high. Add the turkey stock and turkey and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer until vegetables are tender, 30-45 minutes.
3. Cook Chinese noodles according to package directions. Drain and rinse under cold water to remove excess starch. Shake off excess water.
4. Add the noodles to the soup; return the soup to a simmer. Serve immediately, garnished with chopped cilantro.

Serves 8

Turkey or Chicken Stock

- 1 turkey carcass (or 5-6 pound whole chicken)
- 4 quarts of water
- 1 large onion, quartered
- 2 carrots, cut into large chunks
- 2 celery stalks, cut into large chunks
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

1. Put the turkey (or chicken), vegetables, bay leaf, thyme, salt and pepper and water in a large soup pot. Bring to a boil over medium high heat. Skim the foam as it collects on the surface. Reduce the heat; simmer for 1½ hours.
2. Remove the turkey bones and vegetables from the pot and discard. Strain the stock through a fine-mesh sieve. Cool, skim excess fat and refrigerate. (If using a whole chicken, let cool and remove the chicken from the bones. Use 2 cups for the soup and reserve the rest for another use.)