Dinner Renovations: Cook Once, Eat Twice Picadillo Recipe

Hate leftovers? You're not alone. Making two meals from one is a game-saving skill to cure the weeknight cooking blues.

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We all get it: Putting dinner on the table on a busy weeknight can be a challenge, no matter how much you may enjoy cooking. But there *are* ways to make it better. It helps to have a couple of tricks up your sleeve if you want to save money, eat more healthfully, or just have a ready response to the dreaded question: *what's for dinner?*

Since the answer "leftovers" tends to go over like a lead balloon, we've got a different approach: Don't call it leftovers, it's a **dinner renovation**! No, this isn't just a verbal sleight of hand, it's a different approach to making use of last night's meal. Let me explain...

Love It, Don't Pitch It

We all know that cooking at home more frequently will help you save money compared to takeout or eating out. But to keep your grocery bill from ballooning, the second key to saving money is to **avoid food waste**. Unfortunately, leftovers often become just that. But you can turn last night's meal into something *other* than leftovers if you think of it instead as an ingredient for something entirely new. This approach lets you cook once and eat twice without having the same thing more than once: Like that run-down fixer-upper down the street, if you can just see the potential in your leftovers, you can give them an inspired makeover!

To plan your own "cook once, eat twice" meals, start on Day One with a meal that can serve as a base recipe for your Day Two meal. The most common example of this is to roast a chicken for dinner on day one, then use meat from half the chicken in a soup or casserole on day two.

To bring this concept to life, we reached out to Marwin Brown, blogger at **Food Fidelity** to create a pair of healthy weeknight meals for us. Just remember: Don't call them leftovers!

Day One: Mexican Picadillo

Photo by Marwin Brown

On day one, we start off by making a big flavorful pot of picadillo. Picadillo is a classic Cuban comfort food with regional variations found throughout much of Latin America, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. In the most basic terms, it's a Latin meat sauce: all picadillo recipes generally feature ground meat cooked in a sofritto (a Spanish tomato sauce that also varies by region) with ground cumin and other spices. Picadillo is then served over white rice, with black beans, or used as a filling for empanadas or tacos. Cuban picadillo is known for including salty green olives and raisins; other common ingredients that may be included are capers, potatoes, and cinnamon.

This Mexican-style version starts by making a lively sofrito of fire-roasted tomatoes, four cloves garlic, yellow onions, and poblano peppers. (Note: cut 20 minutes off of the recipe time by using canned tomatoes instead of roasting your own!) The sofrito in this recipe, which doesn't get cooked in advance, comes together in just minutes in your blender.

Next, some base vegetables are sauteéd in a bit of olive oil with tomato paste and spices, which develop rich flavors in just a few minutes over heat. White wine is added and reduced before adding the ground beef and more spices. Finally, potatoes and carrots are added along with the sofrito then slowly simmered over low heat with even more chili powder and ground cumin.

Make a pot of white or brown rice, and get ready to eat! Don't be afraid to add more or less of the spices to suit your taste, and definitely taste and adjust as you go. You can also switch up the meat if you like: ground chicken, chorizo, or even corned beef are all good options.

Picadillo is a great example of a base recipe that works well for multiple meals. Using inexpensive ingredients, picadillo is fairly quick to make, can be made in large batches, and freezes well in an airtight plastic container. In addition to eating over rice or baked inside empanadas, picadillo is great to use as a stuffing for vegetables, as we'll see in a moment. In fact, just about any recipe that calls for cooked ground beef is fair game to amp up with picadillo: how about a Mexican-style lasagna with a picadillo filling? Try picadillo-stuffed mushrooms or zucchini boats, or serve it on a soft roll for a Latin American sloppy joe. Use your imagination! In our day two recipe, we went with a classic: stuffed bell peppers.

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Mexican Picadillo

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Day Two: Roasted Picadillo-Stuffed Bell Peppers

Our day two recipe is ready in under a half hour, with only about ten minutes of hands-on time required. Talk about a weeknight wonder! This 5-ingredient picadillo makeover is easy on the budget as well as being high in protein.

Using half of the picadillo from the previous recipe as your base, a savory stuffing is made by mixing the picadillo with rice and a can of black beans. The recipe calls for a microwave bag of rice to make this even quicker to prepare; you can also substitute leftover rice from day one if you have any.

Slice off the tops of your peppers — I like to use a variety of green, yellow and red bell peppers so everyone can pick their favorite color — clean out the inside, and stuff them alternately with the picadillo mixture and shredded cheese before standing the peppers up in a baking dish for a quick trip to the oven. *Pro tip:* you can slice off a tiny bit from the bottom of the peppers to help them stand up straight in the dish; just try not to cut all the way through the bottom so that you don't lose all the juices.

Once in the oven, your stuffed peppers will only take 10-15 minutes at 400 degrees F to be ready for the plate. And if you can't finish all the stuffed peppers for dinner? Well, they'll be great as leftovers tomorrow. Unless ... maybe you could chop them up and put them in an omelet for breakfast? Or smother them in tomato sauce with a couple eggs on top? What ideas do *you* have?

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Roasted Picadillo-Stuffed Bell Peppers

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