Creamy Leftover Turkey & Wild Rice Soup with Fresh Thyme



Christmas Leftover Series | A Cozy December 26 Dinner

Turn leftover Christmas roast turkey into a comforting pot of creamy wild rice soup. Nutty wild rice, tender turkey, sweet carrots, celery, and fresh winter herbs simmer together in a rich, velvety broth. It is an easy, warming meal for the quiet days after Christmas, especially when served with toasted sourdough or warm dinner rolls.

This recipe uses already-cooked turkey, which is added near the end so it warms through without becoming dry.

Recipe at a Glance

- Servings: 6
- Prep Time: 10 minutes
- Cook Time: 40–50 minutes (depending on the rice blend)
- Total Time: 50–60 minutes
- Oven Temperature: Not required
- Equipment: Large heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or soup pot, cutting board, knife, wooden spoon, measuring cups and spoons

YOU'LL NEED

For the Soup

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
- 3 medium carrots, peeled and sliced into half-moons
- 3 celery stalks, thinly sliced
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves (or ½ teaspoon dried thyme)
- ½ teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour
- 6 cups low-sodium turkey or chicken broth
- 1 cup uncooked wild rice blend, rinsed well
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 cups cooked leftover turkey, shredded or diced into bite-size pieces
- ½ cup heavy cream or half-and-half
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley or extra thyme, for garnish

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

1. Sauté the vegetables

Melt the butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat.
Add the onion, carrots, and celery. Cook for 6–8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to soften and the onion becomes translucent.
Add the minced garlic, thyme, and rosemary. Cook for another minute until fragrant.

2. Make the creamy soup base

Sprinkle the flour evenly over the vegetables. Stir continuously for 1–2 minutes so the flour coats the vegetables and cooks through.
Gradually pour in the broth, stirring as you go to prevent lumps from forming.

3. Cook the wild rice

Stir in the rinsed wild rice and bay leaf. Bring the soup to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low.
Cover partially and simmer gently for approximately 30–40 minutes, stirring occasionally. Check the rice according to the package directions. It should be tender with a slight chew, and some grains may split open. If it is still firm, continue simmering and add a little extra broth or water if needed.

4. Add the leftover turkey and cream

Remove and discard the bay leaf. Stir in the cooked turkey and heavy cream.
Simmer uncovered for about 5 minutes, stirring gently, until the turkey is thoroughly heated and the soup is creamy. Avoid boiling vigorously after adding the cream.

5. Season and serve

Taste the soup and adjust the salt and black pepper as needed. Ladle into warm bowls and garnish with fresh parsley or thyme.
Serve hot with crusty sourdough bread or warm dinner rolls.

Before You Begin: Using Christmas Leftovers

This recipe is designed for cooked leftover roast turkey. Remove any bones, skin, and excess fat before shredding or dicing the meat.
Don't have leftover turkey? You can prepare fresh turkey breast or thighs separately, cook until the thickest part reaches 165°F, then shred or dice the meat before adding it to the soup. Store-bought rotisserie chicken also works as an alternative.

Flavor, Pairings & Kitchen Notes

Flavor and Texture: Earthy, nutty wild rice meets tender turkey and sweet vegetables in a savory, herb-infused creamy broth. Fresh thyme and rosemary give the soup a lovely winter aroma.

What to Serve With It:

- Toasted sourdough bread
- Warm garlic dinner rolls
- A simple mixed greens salad with apple cider vinaigrette

Make-Ahead Tip: You can prepare the vegetable and broth base ahead of time. For the best rice texture, cook the wild rice separately and combine it with the soup closer to serving.

Storage: Cool and refrigerate leftovers promptly in airtight containers within 2 hours of cooking. Keep refrigerated for 3–4 days. The rice will continue absorbing broth as the soup sits, so add a splash of broth or water when reheating.

Reheating: Reheat gently on the stovetop, stirring occasionally, until the soup reaches 165°F. Add extra broth or water to loosen the consistency if needed.

Easy Substitutions:

- Dairy-free: Replace the butter with olive oil and use unsweetened dairy-free cream or cashew cream instead of heavy cream. Add it gradually and avoid boiling.
- No fresh herbs? Use ½ teaspoon dried thyme and a small pinch of dried rosemary.
- Using cooked wild rice? Replace the uncooked rice with approximately 3 cups cooked wild rice. Simmer the vegetable and broth base until the carrots are tender, then stir in the cooked rice, turkey, and cream. Heat through before serving.
- No turkey broth? Low-sodium chicken broth works perfectly.

Cook's Confidence Cue: Wild rice should be tender but pleasantly chewy, not hard or crunchy. Different blends cook at different speeds, so taste a few grains before adding the turkey and cream.