Creamy Tuscan Leftover Turkey Skillet Pasta with Sun-Dried Tomatoes



Christmas Leftover Series

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Still have leftover Christmas turkey but don't want another dinner with gravy and stuffing? Give those leftovers an Italian-inspired makeover with this creamy Tuscan turkey pasta.
Tender pieces of cooked turkey are tossed with rigatoni, oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, fresh baby spinach, garlic, and freshly grated Parmesan in a rich, silky cream sauce. The tomatoes add a tangy sweetness, while Parmesan brings a savory depth that makes every bite satisfying.
Best of all, this comforting weeknight dinner comes together in about 30 minutes, making it an easy way to turn holiday leftovers into something everyone will be excited to eat.

Servings: 4
Prep Time: 10 minutes
Cook Time: 20 minutes
Total Time: 30 minutes
Equipment: Large pot for boiling pasta, 12-inch deep skillet or sauté pan, colander, and wooden spoon

YOU'LL NEED

- 12 ounces dried rigatoni or penne pasta
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (or oil from the sun-dried tomato jar)
- 1 medium shallot or 1 small yellow onion, finely diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 cup low-sodium chicken or turkey broth
- ¾ cup heavy cream
- 2½ cups cooked leftover turkey, shredded or cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3 cups fresh baby spinach
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

1. Cook the pasta
Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the rigatoni or penne and cook according to the package directions until al dente.
Before draining, reserve ½ cup of the pasta cooking water.
Drain the pasta and set aside.

2. Sauté the aromatics
While the pasta cooks, heat the olive oil in a deep 12-inch skillet over medium heat.
Add the diced shallot and cook for about 2-3 minutes until softened. Stir in the minced garlic, sliced sun-dried tomatoes, Italian seasoning, and red pepper flakes, if using. Cook for another 30-60 seconds until fragrant.

3. Make the creamy Tuscan sauce
Pour in the chicken or turkey broth and heavy cream. Stir gently and bring the mixture to a gentle simmer over medium-low heat. Let it cook for approximately 3-4 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the sauce begins to thicken slightly. Avoid boiling vigorously.

4. Add the leftover turkey and spinach
Stir in the cooked turkey and baby spinach. Cook for approximately 2-3 minutes, stirring gently, until the spinach wilts and the turkey is thoroughly heated.

5. Combine the pasta and Parmesan
Add the drained pasta to the skillet. Sprinkle in the freshly grated Parmesan and toss until the pasta is coated in a smooth, creamy sauce.
If the sauce becomes too thick, add the reserved pasta water a tablespoon at a time until it reaches your preferred consistency.

6. Season and serve
Taste and adjust with salt and freshly ground black pepper.
Serve immediately with extra Parmesan sprinkled over the top.

Why This Recipe Works for Post-Holiday Weeknights

Leftover turkey has a mild flavor that works beautifully with bold ingredients like sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, and Parmesan. The creamy sauce brings everything together, while fresh spinach adds color and freshness.
Adding the already-cooked turkey near the end keeps it from simmering for too long and becoming dry. You get a satisfying pasta dinner without feeling like you're eating another plate of Christmas dinner.

Flavor Profile, Pairings & Kitchen Notes

Flavor and texture: Rich, creamy, and garlicky, with tangy-sweet sun-dried tomatoes, tender turkey, and fresh spinach. Rigatoni and penne both hold the Parmesan cream sauce beautifully.
What to serve with it: Pair with a crisp Caesar salad, simple green salad, or garlic breadsticks made from leftover dinner rolls.

Easy substitutions:

- Replace leftover turkey with cooked leftover roast chicken or rotisserie chicken.
- Swap rigatoni or penne for fettuccine, fusilli, or farfalle.
- Replace spinach with chopped kale, allowing a few extra minutes for it to soften.
- Use half-and-half instead of heavy cream for a lighter sauce; the finished sauce will be less rich.
- For a cream cheese alternative, whisk 4 ounces of softened cream cheese into approximately 1½ cups of warm broth until smooth before adding it to the skillet. Adjust the consistency with pasta water as needed.

Make-ahead tip: Prepare the sauce base without the turkey, spinach, or Parmesan a day ahead and refrigerate it. Reheat gently, then add the cooked turkey, spinach, freshly cooked pasta, and Parmesan just before serving.

Storage and reheating: Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3–4 days. Reheat in a skillet over low heat with a splash of milk, cream, or broth to loosen the sauce. Heat leftovers to 165°F. The sauce may thicken as it sits, so add liquid gradually.

Cook's Confidence Cue: Grate Parmesan fresh from a block whenever possible. Pre-shredded cheese often contains anti-caking ingredients that can prevent it from melting smoothly. Keep the sauce at a gentle simmer and add Parmesan gradually for a silky finish.

Using fresh turkey instead: If you don't have leftover turkey, cook approximately 2½ cups of bite-sized turkey pieces separately until the thickest pieces reach 165°F. Set aside and follow the recipe, adding the cooked turkey in Step 4.