Loaded Mashed Potato & Holiday Ham Chowder



Christmas Leftover Series | A 30-Minute Cozy Winter Meal

Have leftover garlic mashed potatoes and a few slices of Christmas ham in the refrigerator? Turn them into a rich, creamy chowder with sweet corn, sharp cheddar, and smoky bacon.
Instead of peeling and boiling fresh potatoes, this recipe uses prepared mashed potatoes to create a velvety soup base in minutes. Tender cubes of holiday ham, melted cheddar, and fresh green onions make every bowl hearty and satisfying.
It's an easy way to give Christmas dinner leftovers a delicious second life!

Recipe at a Glance

- Servings: 5
- Prep Time: 10 minutes
- Cook Time: 20 minutes
- Total Time: 30 minutes
- Oven Temperature: Not required
- Equipment: Large soup pot or Dutch oven, whisk, cutting board, knife, measuring cups and spoons

YOU'LL NEED

For the Chowder

- 3 slices thick-cut bacon, chopped (optional)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter (use 2 tablespoons if skipping bacon)
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 2 celery stalks, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 2½ cups leftover mashed potatoes
- 2 cups cooked leftover holiday ham, diced into ½-inch cubes
- 1 cup frozen sweet corn kernels
- ½ cup whole milk or half-and-half
- 1 cup freshly shredded sharp cheddar cheese, plus extra for topping
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced, for garnish

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

1. Cook the bacon and vegetables

Place the chopped bacon in a large soup pot over medium heat. Cook for about 5 minutes until crisp. Transfer the bacon to a paper-towel-lined plate and leave approximately 1 tablespoon of drippings in the pot.
If skipping bacon, melt the butter in the pot instead.
Add the diced onion and celery. Cook for about 5 minutes until softened. Stir in the garlic and smoked paprika and cook for another 30 seconds.

2. Create the creamy potato base

Pour in the chicken or vegetable broth and bring it to a gentle simmer.
Add the leftover mashed potatoes one spoonful at a time, whisking after each addition until they blend into the broth. Continue stirring until the mixture becomes smooth and creamy.
If your mashed potatoes are particularly thick, add a little extra broth to reach your preferred consistency.

3. Add the ham and corn

Stir in the diced leftover ham and frozen corn. Pour in the milk or half-and-half.
Simmer gently over medium-low heat for 6-8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the corn is tender and the ham is heated through. Avoid letting the chowder boil vigorously.

4. Melt in the cheddar

Turn off the heat. Add the shredded cheddar a handful at a time, stirring gently until each addition melts into the chowder.
Taste before adding salt because the ham, cheese, and leftover mashed potatoes may already contain plenty of seasoning. Add black pepper as desired.

5. Serve loaded

Ladle the hot chowder into bowls. Top with crispy bacon, extra shredded cheddar, and sliced green onions.
Serve immediately with warm biscuits, oyster crackers, or toasted sourdough bread.

Before You Begin: Using Christmas Leftovers

This chowder is designed for already-cooked holiday ham and mashed potatoes. Remove any tough edges or excess fat from the ham before dicing it.
If you don't have leftover mashed potatoes, prepare fresh potatoes and mash them with a little butter and milk before starting. If leftover ham isn't available, cooked turkey or rotisserie chicken makes a delicious alternative.

Flavor Profile, Pairings & Kitchen Notes

Flavor and Texture: Rich, creamy, and smoky, with tender pieces of holiday ham, sweet corn, sharp cheddar, and a comforting garlic-potato base.

What to Serve With It:

- Warm buttermilk biscuits
- Oyster crackers
- Toasted sourdough bread
- A simple green salad for a lighter side

Make-Ahead Tip: You can dice the ham, chop the vegetables, and measure the ingredients ahead of time. For the best texture, add the cheddar just before serving.

Storage: Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to 3 days. Refrigerate within 2 hours of cooking.
Reheating: Warm gently in a saucepan over low heat, stirring frequently. Add a splash of broth or milk if the chowder has thickened. Reheat until it reaches 165°F. Avoid boiling vigorously, as the cheese may separate.

Easy Substitutions:

- No leftover ham? Use cooked leftover turkey or rotisserie chicken.
- No garlic mashed potatoes? Plain mashed potatoes work well. Add an extra pinch of garlic powder if desired.
- Different cheese: Sharp white cheddar or Gruyère can replace regular sharp cheddar.
- No bacon? Simply use butter or olive oil to sauté the vegetables.
- Fresh potatoes instead of leftovers? Peel and dice approximately 1½ pounds of potatoes. Boil until fork-tender, drain, and mash with a little butter and milk. Allow them to cool slightly before using. This adds preparation time to the recipe.

Cook's Confidence Cue: Take the pot off the heat before adding the cheddar. Freshly grated cheese melts more smoothly than pre-shredded cheese, which often contains anti-caking ingredients. Add the cheese gradually and stir gently for a silky finish.