



Helpful Tips for Your Thanksgiving Day Turkey

Buying Tips

Size? Figure 1 1/2 lbs per person if you want a little left over for sandwiches, 1 Lb per person is the minimum.

Definitions: *Fresh* means the bird has been kept at 26 degrees or above. *Frozen* means it has been held at 0 degrees or below and will be frozen solid. *Natural* means the turkey has not been injected with artificial moistening or flavoring agents. *Free Range* means the bird has had access to the out of doors. *Organic* means it is free of antibiotics. *Kosher* means the turkey is always brined (soaked in water and salt) which makes it moist.

How to Handle Your Turkey

If you are buying a fresh turkey, buy it a day or two before roasting and keep it in the coldest part of your refrigerator.

A frozen turkey should be kept frozen until you are ready to defrost it. Submerge your frozen turkey in a sink of cold water. Change the water often so that it remains cold and count on about 30 minutes of underwater time per pound (about 10 hours for a 20 lb turkey). You can also defrost your turkey in the refrigerator. Estimate about 24 hours for every 5 lbs or about 4 days for a 20 lb turkey.

Prepping

Unwrap the turkey and pull the giblets and neck from the body and/or neck cavities. Everything but the liver is good for making the broth. You can sauté the liver, dice it, and add it to the stuffing or roast it, mash it and mix it into the gravy for additional flavor. If there are big gobs of yellow fat inside the turkey, pull them out, cut them up and toss them into the roasting pan. They'll add richness to the pan juices.

Seasoning Your Turkey

You can choose from a number of options. Two of the more popular are “**Topical**” and “**Self Basting**”. For a traditional topical seasoning, brush the exterior of the turkey with melted butter or spray it with vegetable oil then sprinkle a seasoning mixture of Paprika, Garlic Powder, Poultry Seasoning and Ground Black Pepper. Avoid salt in your seasoning mix as it tends to draw moisture from the meat. To prepare a “self basting turkey”, prepare a softened butter mixture using unsalted butter and the same seasoning mixture. The easiest way to add the butter is to loosen the skin from the meat by working your hand from the neck cavity across the breast and over the thigh. Use your hands to rub the softened butter mixture under the skin and over the meat. Once coated, you may still want to rub a little of the mixture over the skin to protect the skin and help it to color nicely.

Roast at 325 to 350 degrees. Estimate approximately 15 minutes per pound of Turkey.

Roasting

Adding broth to the roasting pan before roasting **may** create excessive steam and can inhibit the skin from properly browning. In addition, if you're roasting a fresh or brined turkey, it will do little if anything to make your meat more moist. Also, keep in mind that the leaner white breast meat cooks a bit faster and is “done” at a *slightly* lower temperature than the dark meat of the legs and thighs. Turning the turkey “upside down” at about 120 F (or a little better than half way through its roasting) will even out the cooking process and the entire bird will be fully & evenly cooked when it's ready to come out of the oven.

Basting

With proper pre-preparation in addition to adding the step of roasting breast side down during the last stage of roasting, basting your turkey isn't actually necessary although it has been a traditional “roasting ritual”. In fact, basting during the last hour of roasting can actually prohibit browning and adds little if any moisture to the meat.

Knowing When to Stop

To get an accurate reading, insert an “Insta-Read” thermometer into the thickest part of the turkey's thigh parallel to the thigh bone. (Make sure it doesn't touch the bone). When the thigh meat registers **165 degrees** pull the turkey from the oven. Carry over heat will cause the temperature to rise another 5 degrees while the turkey is on the counter, bringing the final cooked temperature up to **170 degrees**—perfection.

To Stuff or Not to Stuff ?

Stuffing your holiday bird is a matter of choice. However, you may wish to try an alternative method, particularly if you have found your turkey meat to be somewhat dry. Was it the brand? Should I have gotten a fresh bird rather than a frozen? And do those Pop up timers REALLY work? Rather than beat yourself up wondering where you're going to find that perfect bird that never fails to please, you may want to try this....

Turkeys, like most meats are composed primarily of water. It is the breast meat however that is exposed to the greatest amount of direct heat and is left the most exposed *especially* if your oven is electric and you have top heating coils. The breast meat and the water contained therein is also subjected to another undeniable reality, **gravity**. Lastly, and perhaps a reason why many turkey breasts are dry is that most people stuff their turkeys. Why does this cause a turkey breast to become dry? Well, quite simply, it is next to impossible for a stuffing to be made with more hydration (moisture) than the turkey meat itself has. As a result, 3 things happen when you put a stuffed turkey in the oven.

1. *Heat drives the moisture toward the inside of the bird.* (Ever cut into a roast just after it comes out of the oven and see the juices released from the inside of the meat?)
2. *The stuffing is drier than the flesh which creates a "wicking action" similar to absorbent paper towels when wiping up a spill on your counter-top. Thus, the juices are absorbed in the drier stuffing rather than stay in the breast where you want it.*
3. *Gravity pushes everything downward.*

So, how can you get a great stuffing and a tasty, moist turkey at the same time? Try this 10 Step Process.

1. Follow our advice regarding buying and prepping your bird.
2. Instead of stuffing your bird with bread stuffing, prepare a mixture of 2 parts Onion, 1 part Carrot and 1 part Celery. Chef's call this mixture a *mirepoix*. Make enough mirepoix to stuff the inside cavity with a little room to spare. Also, place a sprig of fresh thyme and or sage and a few cracked peppercorns for additional flavor.
3. Prepare your favorite stuffing recipe and place in an oven safe glass or earthenware container. Consider adding additional chicken stock, milk or other moist ingredients but do not bake it until your turkey is in the oven and about half way baked.
4. Follow our seasoning recommendations for the turkey.
5. Roast the turkey at **325 to 350 degrees** (Place the turkey on a rack *above* the pan) for the first half to two thirds of its oven time ***breast up***, and most important, for the last one third of the cooking time, upside down.
6. After turning the bird upside down, extract some of the juices from the roasting pan and baste the stuffing instead of the turkey.
7. Place the stuffing in the oven and bake it. Consider additional "basting" with melted butter.
8. Refer to our *Roasting and Knowing When to Stop* guidelines but leave the turkey upside down once you have removed it from the oven. Let it rest 10 to 15 minutes or so.
9. Remove the vegetable mixture from the inside cavity of the turkey.
10. Before serving, turn the turkey breast side up. If you are really a purist, consider stuffing your bird with the cooked stuffing before presenting it to the table. One of the sacrifices in this method is the skin. Although the skin should remain intact, it perhaps will not be as crisp as a bird roasted entirely breast up through the entire roasting process. The choice is yours.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and have fun cooking!

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National Turkey Federation Roasting Guidelines for a Fresh or Thawed Turkey Roast in a 325 degrees F Conventional Oven on the Lowest Oven Rack

Weight	Unstuffed Turkey	Stuffed Turkey
8 to 12 pounds	2 1/2 to 3 hours	3 to 3 1/2 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 3/4 hours	3 1/2 to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hours	4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 1/2 hours	4 1/4 to 4 3/4 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 1/2 to 5 hours	4 3/4 to 5 1/4 hours
24 to 30 pounds	5 to 5 1/4 hours	5 1/4 to 6 1/4 hours