

TURKEY BASICS



Turkey is a low-cost, low-fat, nutritious food you can serve year around. Here are some easy basic turkey cooking and food safety tips to help prepare a healthy and hearty turkey dinner.

Buying a Whole Turkey

FROZEN	Allow ¾ to 1 lb. per person for an 8-12 pound turkey. Larger birds (over 12 pounds) have more meat - allow ½ to ¾ pound per person . Keep frozen until ready to thaw. (See thawing)
FROZEN PRE-STUFFED	Allow 1 ¼ lbs. Per person. Keep frozen until ready to cook. DO NOT THAW. USDA only recommends pre-stuffed turkeys that display the USDA or State mark of inspection on package. These turkeys have been processed under controlled conditions.
FRESH	1 lb. per person. Buy 1-2 days before cooking. DO NOT BUY PRE-STUFFED FRESH TURKEY.

Thawing Turkey (for frozen, unstuffed turkeys only)

There are three ways to safely thaw your turkey ---- In the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. **DO NOT thaw poultry or meat at room temperature.**

In the Refrigerator (40 °F or below)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow at least 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds. (The colder the refrigerator the longer it will take). • Keep turkey in its original wrapper. Place on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak. Place in the refrigerator. • The thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1-2 days before cooking. 			
4 to 12 pounds	1-3 days	16-20 pounds	4-5 days
12 to 16 pounds	3-4 days	20-24 pounds	5-6 days
In Cold Water			
Allow approximately 30 minutes per pound.			
Keep the turkey in its original wrap and place in a large plastic bag. Make sure the water is not able to leak through the wrapping. Submerge the wrapped bird in cold tap water in a deep sink or large ice chest (place ice chest outside or in a cool location). To speed up thawing, change the water every 30 minutes. Once the turkey is thawed cook immediately or refrigerate up to 2 days before cooking.			
In the Microwave			
Check your owner’s manual for the size bird that will fit in your microwave; the minutes per pound; and the power setting to use for thawing. Remove all outside wrapping and giblets and neck from the cavity. Place turkey on a microwave-safe dish to catch any juices that may leak.			
Cook the turkey immediately after thawing in a microwave.			

Safety Tips for Thawing Turkeys

- ❖ Do not thaw on the counter, in warm water, or in a warm oven.
- ❖ Thaw bird until the legs are pliable and the neck and giblet packets can be removed. Refrigerate turkey until ready to roast.
- ❖ Thawed turkeys can be stored in the refrigerator for 1-2 days before roasting.

Preparing Turkey for Roasting

- ❖ Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling raw poultry.
- ❖ Remove the plastic wrapper from the thawed bird. Remove the giblets and neck packets from the cavity and neck. Cook separately.
- ❖ **Do not wash the poultry.** Washing scatters bacteria that may contaminate other foods. (Proper cooking kills bacteria that may be on raw poultry.)
- ❖ Set your oven temperature no lower than 325°F. Place the bird on a rack in a roasting pan.
- ❖ After bird is prepared for roasting wash sink, counters, cutting boards and utensils with hot soapy water and then disinfect with a bleach solution (1 tsp. chlorine bleach /quart of warm water)

To Stuff or Not to Stuff

The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not recommend stuffing turkeys. Researchers have shown that stuffing prolongs the turkey baking time and prevents uniform cooking. If the stuffing inside the bird doesn't reach a high enough temperature to kill bacteria, you could get a serious type of food poisoning.

If you do stuff a turkey, you must follow these basic rules to do it safely:

- ❖ Stuffing should be prepared just before it goes into the bird. The dry ingredients can be mixed together and chilled ahead of time and the liquids mixed in just before the bird is stuffed and placed in a preheated 325°F oven.
- ❖ Stuff the bird loosely. Make sure the stuffing is on the moist side. Heat will destroy bacteria more rapidly in a wet environment.
- ❖ Use a meat thermometer to check the temperature of both the bird and the stuffing. Using a food thermometer, be sure that the center of the stuffing reaches 165°F. before removing the turkey from the oven.

Cooking Tips for Baking the Stuffing Separately

Place the prepared stuffing in a covered, greased baking dish. Start baking the stuffing 1-2 hours before the end of the turkey roasting time. Bake until the internal temperature of the stuffing reaches 165°F.

Roasting Tips

1. Place turkey, breast side up on a rack, in a shallow roasting pan. Tie down or tuck in legs and wings to prevent over cooking. String, metal or wooden skewers or round toothpicks can be used.
2. A meat thermometer can be placed in the thickest part of the thigh, or an instant read thermometer can be used to check the internal temperature at intervals throughout the roasting.
3. Place turkey in a preheated 325°F oven. A tent of aluminum foil may be placed over the turkey for the first 1-1 ½ hours, and then removed for browning.
4. A whole turkey is safely roasted when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. If your turkey has a 'pop-up temperature indicator it is still recommended that you also check the internal temperature of the turkey with a food thermometer. The minimum internal temperature should reach 165°F for safety.
5. Remove the bird from the oven and let it sit 20 minutes to allow juices to set. Remove stuffing and carve the bird.
6. Turkeys can also be cooked in a covered roasting pan or electric roaster. The cooking time will be shorter than in the conventional oven and the meat will be very moist.

Roasting Chart (Fresh or Thawed Turkey)

These times are approximate and should always be used in conjunction with a properly placed thermometer OR temperature should be checked periodically the last 1-2 hours of cooking until 165°F is reached.

UNSTUFFED	TIME	STUFFED	TIME
8 TO 12 LBS.	2 ¼ TO 3 HOURS	8 TO 12 LBS.	3 TO 3 ½ HOURS
12 TO 14 LBS.	3 TO 3 ¾ HOURS	12 TO 14 LBS.	3 ½ TO 4 HOURS
14 TO 18 LBS.	3 ¾ TO 4 ¼ HOURS	14 TO 18 LBS.	4 TO 4 ¼ HOURS
18 TO 20 LBS.	4 ¼ TO 4 ½ HOURS	18 TO 20 LBS.	4 ¼ TO 4 ¾ HOURS
20 TO 24 LBS.	4 ½ TO 5 HOURS	20 TO 24 LBS.	4 ¾ TO 5 ¼ HOURS

Storing Leftovers

Debone turkey and refrigerate all leftovers in shallow containers WITHIN 2 HOURS OF COOKING. For best quality use leftover turkey, stuffing and gravy within 3-4 days freeze it for 2-6 months. Reheat leftovers to a temperature of 165°F or until hot and steaming. **Discard any turkey, stuffing and gravy left out longer than 2 hours.**

Safety Tips for ready prepared turkey dinner

- If the dinner is picked up or delivered HOT, the food must be kept at 140 °F or above or eaten within 2 hours. It's not a good idea to try and keep the foods hot longer than 2 hours because they will dry out.
- If holding the food longer than 2 hours, remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity, divide the turkey into smaller pieces, and refrigerate everything in separate, shallow containers. Reheat the meat and stuffing to 165 °F just before serving.
- When picking up a cooked turkey dinner that has been chilled, do not accept a whole turkey with stuffing inside. If the turkey and stuffing were cooked and refrigerated separately, both should be safe. Keep these cold foods cold and refrigerate them immediately upon arrival at home. Serve the meal within 3 to 4 days.
- Do not reheat a whole cooked turkey. Instead, carve the cooked meat and reheat the slices or pieces.
- If the cooked turkey has a USDA inspection seal on the packaging, it has been processed under controlled conditions. Follow the package directions for reheating, and storing this product.

Traveling with a Cooked Turkey

If you are transporting a cooked bird, cook it the day before, without stuffing, take it off the bone, and refrigerate meat immediately in shallow dishes. When cold it can be packaged in travelable containers transported on ice. The turkey can then be reheated upon arrival.

Other Questions

Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-674-6854, OR your local County Extension Office.

Additional information at <http://www.usda.gov/fsis>

Source: OSU Master Food Preserver Program

