

The Ultimate Thanksgiving Turkey Guide

By gThankYou! Employee Gifts



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In this handy, straightforward guide, you'll find everything you need to choose, prepare and serve your Thanksgiving turkey. Whether it's a Butterball® or a heritage bird that's pre-brined, roasted or destined for the smoker, use this guide to streamline the centerpiece of your holiday feast.



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PART ONE: PLANS & DECISIONS

A THANKSGIVING TURKEY TIMELINE

Planning for Thanksgiving can start several weeks ahead of time. For the best selection, place your turkey order during the first two weeks of November.

If you're going to cook a fresh (not frozen) turkey, plan to pick up the bird a day ahead if you want to brine it. The turkey will need 10-12 hours in a flavorful brine.

Also, if you plan to buy a frozen turkey, you must allow approximately 24 hours thawing in the refrigerator **for every 5 pounds of bird**. Use the chart below to determine defrosting requirements.

NOTE: Be sure to **thaw the turkey in the refrigerator** (as recommended by the **National Turkey Federation** and the U.S. Department of Agriculture). And see **Chart 1: Thawing times for Thanksgiving Turkey** below.

Chart 1: Thawing Times for Thanksgiving Turkey

Turkey Weight	Approximate Thawing Time Refrigerator	Approximate Thawing Time Cold Water
4 - 12 lbs.	1 - 3 days	2 - 6 hours
12 - 16 lbs	3 - 4 days	6 - 8 hours
16 - 20 lbs.	4 - 5 days	8 - 10 hours
20 - 24 lbs.	5 - 6 days	10 - 12 hours

Chart credit: [Foodreference.about.com](https://www.foodreference.com)

When planning your meal, keep in mind that the larger the turkey, the longer it will take to both thaw and to cook. Additionally, a stuffed bird will take longer to roast than one that has no stuffing inside. **See Chart 4. Roasted Turkey Cooking Times, Unstuffed and Stuffed.**

If you have additional questions or want to consult a reliable source about preparation of the turkey and food safety, the **US Department of Agriculture's Let's Talk Turkey** is an excellent source.



HOW MUCH TURKEY?

Start with a simple estimate of one pound of turkey per adult.

If you want to have leftovers, then plan on 1 ½ pounds per person. Refer to the chart below.

Chart 2. How Much Turkey do we Need?

People	Turkey Size (at 1 1/2 lbs. per person)
8 people	12-14 lbs.
10 people	15-16 lbs.
12 people	18-20 lbs.
14 people	21-22 lbs.
16 people	24 lbs.

Chart credit: [Epicurious.com](https://www.epicurious.com)

If the celebration is for a small group of two or three people, consider buying a 2-1/2 pound turkey breast. It will cook faster than a whole bird and you'll still have leftovers.

Consult a [roasting pan guide](#) for the size pan you'll need. A pan that measures about 17 by 12 inches (and is three inches deep) is big enough for a 30 lb. bird.

QUICK TIP

Buying a jumbo bird? Make sure it will fit in your oven first!

A raw turkey is the central focus, surrounded by fresh ingredients like sage leaves, carrots, and a bowl of mixed spices. The background is a dark, textured surface.

FRESH OR FROZEN?

During the holidays both fresh and frozen turkeys are available in stores. There is a lot of discussion among chefs and bloggers about which has better flavor, and which is more tender or juicy. The National Turkey Federation says that current flash freezing methods have eliminated past problems in meat texture resulting from freezing so that both fresh and frozen birds result in a safe and delicious turkey.

If you choose a frozen turkey, be sure to:

- Plan for the time needed to thaw the turkey. See [Chart 1: Thawing Times for Thanksgiving Turkey](#).

For more information on thawing a frozen turkey, follow the [National Turkey Federation's](#) advice on how to safely [thaw a turkey](#).

In fact, both fresh and frozen turkey can be delicious. Some experts believe that the type of turkey and whether or not it's brined may have more influence on flavor than whether the bird is fresh or frozen.

QUICK TIP

Turkey still frozen? Thaw under cold running water, and change water frequently. DO NOT use a microwave or hot water to thaw.



TYPE OF TURKEY?

The choice of which Thanksgiving turkey to buy is a bit more complex now than years ago. Today there are several types of turkey to choose from at your supermarket. Most of the choices tell you something about how the turkey was raised, if it was injected, or whether the turkey is a heritage variety or a newer variety. Here are the basics:

Turkey, plain and simple: Commercial turkeys are raised on an industrial-scale. They are artificially inseminated and are bred to grow fast to minimize production costs, so that they're ready for sale in 12-14 weeks. Commercial turkeys have been bred to have more white meat and to weigh more than heritage birds. This means they're bigger than non-industrial-produced birds, but they may skimp on flavor. Commercial turkeys are the most common types of turkey you find in the supermarket. To help improve the flavor of these turkeys, try a brine, a spice rub, or smoke them.

Natural: A turkey with this label has no artificial ingredients (including animal by-products) or colorants, and is minimally processed. However, "natural" on the label tells you nothing about how the turkey was raised or if it was fed antibiotics. Birds with this label may not be worth the extra cost.

Free-Range: According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "free-range" means a bird had access to the outdoors (though it could be a small door across a crowded hen house). Raising a turkey free-range is generally considered more humane and healthy than raising them without access to the outdoors. Free-range turkeys are available at specialty markets, farmers' markets and supermarkets. Free-range could be a good option if you don't want to pay for an organic bird.

Certified Organic: Certified organic turkeys are free-range, free of antibiotics, and fed an all-vegetarian diet of organic, pesticide-free grains and grasses. They're expensive, but many cooks say they're worth it, for their superior flavor.



Heritage Turkeys: Heritage turkeys are raised in smaller flocks than commercial birds. Birds are slower growing so they can take up to eight months to be ready for market. Heritage birds are bred principally for flavor. At top dollar (it can cost \$100 for a big bird) heritage turkeys have become popular again. According to the food-centric radio show **The Splendid Table**, flavors of heritage birds are more distinctive than a supermarket turkey, though there may be more bone-to-meat than with conventional turkeys.

Self-Basting (or pre-brined): These turkeys are injected with oils and salt to keep the meat moist. Self-basting birds tend to be factory-farmed so most are fed antibiotics. **Cook's Illustrated** claims the meat on self-basting turkeys can be so wet that it's **mushy** and may have an off-flavor. They recommend buying a bird with "turkey" as the only ingredient (without the additional ingredients in a self-basting turkey).

Kosher: A kosher turkey has been prepared under rabbinical supervision observing Jewish dietary laws for slaughter and butchering. When comparing texture and flavor of various types of turkey, **Cook's Illustrated evaluated kosher turkey** as having an off-flavor and texture.

QUICK TIP

If you definitely don't want a self-basting bird, check the label & make sure the only ingredient is "turkey".



COOKING METHOD & TIMING?

There are four basic ways to cook a whole holiday turkey: roasting, grilling, smoking, and deep frying. See the chart below to help you decide which method you prefer. Think about your preferences as well as the required preparation and cooking times.

*NOTE: A stuffed turkey will take longer to roast than an unstuffed one. **See Chart 4: Roasted Turkey Cooking Times, Unstuffed and Stuffed.***

Chart 3: Cooking Method and Timing

Cooking Method	Prep	Cooking Time	Other Tips
Roast	Preheat oven to 325°F. Roast turkey in the oven in a pan. Bake frequently with pan juices	Cook until thermometer inserted in thigh reaches a minimum of 165°F	Can brine, use a rub, and/or stuff before roasting
Grill	Arrange white coals on sides. Put drip pan in center below grate. Turkey on grill above drip pan; Place the bird breast side up. Put lid on grill	15 minutes per pound but done when internal temperature in thick part of thigh is 180°F and juices run clear.	Keep grill covered
Smoke	Coat turkey with Olive oil & a rub. Heat smoker till internal temperature is 240°F. Place breast-side up	30-40 minutes per pound	Baste turkey with oil every hour to keep it moist. Smoke the turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F. It's done when the leg is loose all the way to the thigh.
Deep Fry	Heat 3-5 gallons peanut oil in fryer or stock pot to 350°F. Submerge turkey slowly.	Fry three minutes per pound	Drain on paper towel. See Paula Deen's method



Roasting: Roasting a turkey in the oven is the most common way to cook a turkey, and probably the simplest.

To roast, you put the turkey on a roasting pan and place in a preheated oven at 325°F. Baste frequently with pan juices (or coat it with butter) and begin checking the temperature about 30 minutes before it’s expected to be done (based on weight).

Cook until a thermometer inserted in a thigh reaches a **minimum of 165°F**. Check the internal temperature with your own trusty meat thermometer – don’t trust an embedded “pop-up” variety.

Chart 4: Roasted Turkey Cooking Times, Unstuffed and Stuffed

UNSTUFFED	
4 to 8 pounds (breast)	1½ to 3¼ hours
8 to 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours
14 to 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours
STUFFED	
4 to 6 pounds (breast)	Not usually applicable
6 to 8 pounds (breast)	2½ to 3½ hours
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4¾ to 5¼ hours

One alternative to basting is **roasting the turkey in an oven bag**. Oven bags are available at most supermarkets where you find aluminum foil or plastic wrap. You can still brine the turkey and also add flavorings to the bag before it goes in the oven. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS provided in the box—especially adding flour and for puncturing the bag before roasting. Cooking time is shorter with a bag and estimated times are included in the instructions. Turkeys roasted in oven bags do not need to be basted, cook faster than roasting outside a pan, and the meat stays very moist and tender.



Grill: You can grill turkey **on a charcoal kettle grill** or a **gas grill** using instructions from Weber Grills. You can use brine or a rub for grilled turkey but **don't stuff a bird before grilling it!**

For a **gas grill**, you can add water to the drip pan to increase moisture. Use indirect heat where the grill works like an oven, so place the turkey away from direct flames. Use **Chart 3: Cooking Method and Timing** to estimate timing, and then insert the thermometer into the thigh to check the temperature. When it reaches a **minimum of 165°F**, the meat is done.

On a **charcoal grill**, put a drip pan (disposable aluminum pan) in the center. Light the coals with a chimney starter. When coals are white, place them on either side of the drip pan.

Place the turkey--breast side up--in the middle of the grill over the drip pan. Grill about 15 minutes per pound; that means a 14-pound turkey should be on the grill 3-1/2 hours.

After two hours or so, carefully lift the grate while wearing mitts and add a few briquettes to the charcoal on each side of the drip pan. Remove the turkey from the grill when it is 165°F. Often the temperature rises a few degrees after you remove it from the grill.

Smoking: To smoke a turkey, Bobby Flay on Food Network says to coat the bird with olive oil. You may also want to use a flavorful rub. Then fire up your smoker and get the internal temperature to about 240°F. Place the bird on the smoker--breast-side up. Every hour or so, brush the bird with a little oil. This keeps the skin from becoming dry and gives it a nice golden color.

Cooking times are longer in a smoker since the temperature is lower. Estimate 30-40 minutes per pound. On average, a 12-15 pound bird takes about 6 hours, a 16-20 pound bird can take up to 8 hours.

Smoke the turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F. It's done when the leg is loose all the way to the thigh when you try to jiggle it.

*Note: If you don't have a smoker, use **this guide from Serious Eats** on how to turn your kettle grill into a smoker.*

Deep Frying: The queen of Southern cooking, Paula Deen, offers **her method for deep-frying a turkey**: Use a turkey fryer or a very large pot. Heat 3-5 gallons of peanut oil to 350°F. Lower turkey into the hot oil very carefully. Be sure the entire turkey is submerged under the oil. Fry the turkey three minutes per pound (plus 5 minutes per bird, if you're frying more than one bird). When finished cooking, remove the turkey from the oil and drain it on paper towels.



PICK A RECIPE

Whichever cooking method you choose to prepare your turkey, you'll find a lot of recipes for cooking turkeys available online. Besides the cooking method, a recipe will help you add flavorings and more detailed instructions for preparation and cooking. Decide on a recipe for the centerpiece of your celebration:

- **Best Thanksgiving Recipes and Menu Ideas**, Epicurious (home of Bon Appetit and Gourmet magazines).
- **Thanksgiving Recipes**, The Food Network.
- **Magnificent Thanksgiving menus**, Cooking Light.
- **The Thanksgiving Guide**, The Splendid Table (American Public Media).
- **Best Thanksgiving Ever!**, Delish.

QUICK TIP

Frying is fastest! Turkey in a 350°F fryer takes about 3 minutes per pound, plus 5 minutes for each subsequent bird. Your typical 12-14 pound bird fries in about 45 minutes.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

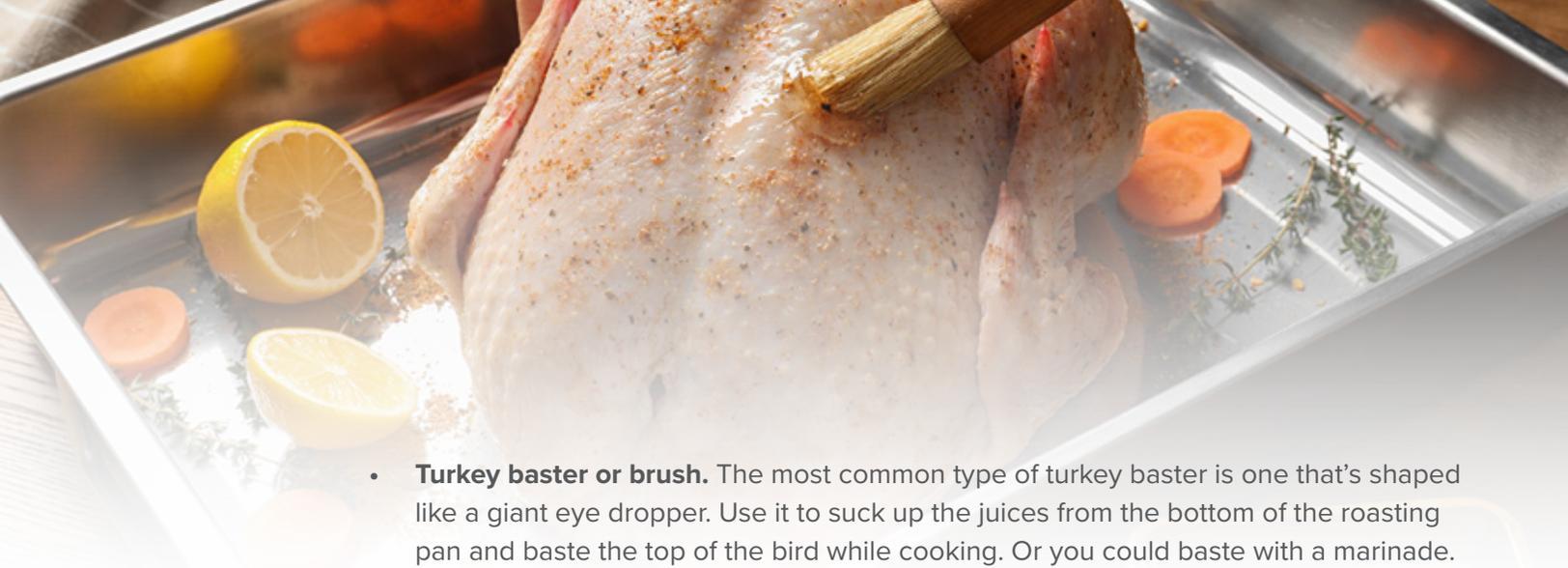
Everyone has their own set of tools and gadgets for preparing a turkey. Here are the essentials you'll want to have. (Keep in mind that you may need some additional tools--depending on the recipe and cooking method you choose.)

- **Roasting pan** (a rack is optional): If you're going to roast your turkey in the oven you'll need a roasting pan that's bigger than your turkey. Some pans come with a roasting rack to set the turkey on. If you have limited storage space or don't want to invest in a pan, buy a large, heavy-duty (disposable) aluminum roasting pan from the supermarket.
- **Meat thermometer:** A meat thermometer has a metal probe that you briefly put into the thickest part of the turkey--toward the end of cooking time--to check the temperature. (This is not the same as a pop-up thermometer that comes with some turkeys. Pop-up thermometers are much less reliable and accurate.) Chefs and food safety experts consider the use of a meat thermometer the most accurate way to determine if the turkey is cooked.

QUICK TIP

Don't trust a pop-up thermometer when smoking a turkey; it will "pop up" before the bird is done.

- **Turkey platter.** Use a large enough platter to nicely display and serve the turkey.
- **Carving knife & fork.** To carve the turkey and get it to the table, use a carving knife that's 8-10 inches long, not serrated, and sharp, along with a long-handled, two-pronged fork.
- **Kitchen shears.** These can be handy to separate pieces when carving the turkey.



- **Turkey baster or brush.** The most common type of turkey baster is one that's shaped like a giant eye dropper. Use it to suck up the juices from the bottom of the roasting pan and baste the top of the bird while cooking. Or you could baste with a marinade. Some people use a basting brush to apply oil or melted butter to the bird's skin before placing it in the oven.
- **Whisk.** A whisk is handy for making gravy. Use either a flat-bottomed (roux) whisk or a balloon-shaped whisk.

Optional tools that are nice to have but not essential:

- **Fat separator:** This tool separates the turkey juice from the turkey fat when you pour off pan drippings from roasted turkey (or for other meat). There's really no other way to get this task done efficiently and avoid getting lots of fat and bits of turkey or stuffing into your gravy boat.
- **Two (or more) cutting boards:** For food safety reasons, it's good to have one cutting board for vegetables and breads, and another non-porous board for preparing meats. And you may want a third cutting board to carve and serve the turkey -- a wooden board makes an attractive centerpiece for the table in this case. Be sure to choose one that's big enough and that has a well around it to catch the juices from the turkey.
- **Aluminum foil:** Foil can be used to cover the turkey breast in the oven to prevent over-cooking and drying out the meat. Also use it to lightly cover the turkey when you take it out of the oven to rest before carving—and eating.
- **Cotton trussing twine and trussing needle:** Some people use food-grade trussing string and a needle to tie the turkey's legs together before roasting. This keeps the stuffing from falling out of the cavity. Cooking twine usually comes in a roll. Be sure to remove the twine before serving the turkey. Some people use skewers (instead of twine) to close the cavity. Others leave the cavity open.
- **Casserole dish:** If you choose not to stuff the bird, or if you make extra stuffing, grease a glass or ceramic casserole dish with oil or butter and bake the stuffing in the oven according to the recipe you use.



- **Brining bag:** Better than all-purpose zip-sealed bags, brining bags are heavy duty and leak-proof. Look for brining bags that have double-zipper seal protection against leakage, and make sure you get one big enough to hold your turkey. It is worth paying a little extra to get a high quality brining bag, as a leak or breakage can be disastrous, spilling uncooked turkey juices all over the other food in your refrigerator.
- **Gravy boat:** Even though you can serve gravy in anything, a gravy boat makes it easy to pour the gravy over the turkey and dressing. Some gravy boats even have warmers, or are insulated, to keep the gravy fresh and warm – a nice touch.
- **Other tools:** You may find other things that are useful in preparing or serving your Thanksgiving feast, including a mandolin slicer (to evenly slice squash for a traditional butternut squash gratin) and a food mill or potato ricer for making the creamiest mashed potatoes.

For more information on tools to prepare your meal, you may also want to check:

- **[The 14 Best Thanksgiving Gadgets](#)**, The Spruce Eats.
- **[11 Trusty Tools for Thanksgiving Dinner](#)**, Real Simple magazine.



PART TWO: PREPARATION & COOKING

PREP THE BIRD FOR COOKING

It's time to prepare your turkey! A few tips:

- Don't rinse it. Rinsing a turkey before you cook it can spread unwanted bacteria around your kitchen.
- Remove any pin feathers with kitchen shears, and remove the giblets (neck, heart, liver and gizzard) from inside the turkey cavity.
- Tuck the first joint of each wing under the bird, to prevent the wings from burning. (If they pop out when you put it onto your roasting pan, just push them back under again.)
- Using a piece of kitchen twine, tie the legs together (it's often helpful to have one person hold them and the other person tie). Snip off excess twine.

QUICK TIP

Scatter a mix of root vegetables - coarsely chopped onion, sweet potato, winter squash, turnips, celeriac and a whole clove of garlic - at the bottom of your roasting pan. Then fight over them when the turkey is done!

A top-down view of a whole turkey in a stainless steel pot. The turkey is surrounded by fresh ingredients including a whole carrot, a lemon, a cinnamon stick, and various green herbs like parsley and thyme. The pot is set on a wooden surface.

TO BRINE OR NOT TO BRINE?

To add flavor to your turkey, you can use a wet brine or a dry brine. Both add flavor and texture to the turkey.

To use a wet brine on a turkey before cooking, you need a brining bag or container that's large enough to hold the turkey submerged in salt water and spices for several hours or overnight. Using a wet brine before cooking, the turkey meat comes out very moist and flavored by the herbs and spices.

A dry brine is much easier to do since you don't use water to soak the bird. You rub salt and spices into the skin and cavity and let it sit in the refrigerator for hours or days (depending on the recipe).

Several websites offer recipes, instructions, and tips for brining a turkey:

- [Turkey Brining Recipes and Tips](#), Epicurious.
- [How to Wet Brine a Turkey](#), Allrecipes.
- [How to Dry Brine a Turkey](#), The Kitchn.
- [Dry-Brined Turkey](#), The New York Times.

QUICK TIP

Don't brine a kosher or pre-brined turkey. It will be too salty.



STUFFING OR DRESSING?

The terms “stuffing” (more typically used in the northern United States) and “dressing” (more of a southern term) are used interchangeably. However, the main difference between the two is that stuffing is prepared and inserted into the cavity of the bird so it’s cooked inside the turkey with its juices. Dressing would be baked in a greased casserole dish.

When stuffing is handled according to a reliable recipe, it can be safe and delicious. If you want to roast a turkey with stuffing, **use these recommendations** from food safety experts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

- When making stuffing, mix dry (bread) and wet (celery onions, etc.) ingredients at the last minute—right before stuffing the bird.
- Stuff loosely and roast immediately.
- Roast bird at 325°F or higher (never at a lower temperature). See **Chart 4 - Roasted Turkey Cooking Times, Unstuffed and Stuffed**.
- Check internal temperatures with a meat thermometer in the turkey thigh AND in the stuffing. **BOTH** must reach the required minimum internal temperature of 165°F before you remove the bird from the oven.
- Rest the turkey for the required 20 minutes and then immediately remove all the stuffing and carve it.

QUICK TIP

Check turkey and stuffing temperatures with a meat thermometer - they BOTH must be 165°F or higher to be safe.

For recipe ideas see:

- **Best Thanksgiving Stuffing and Dressing Recipes**, Food Network.
- **Thanksgiving Stuffing and Dressing Recipes**, Allrecipes.
- **25 Sensational Stuffing and Dressing Recipes**, Martha Stewart.



THERMOMETER TIPS

There's a very simple way to make sure your turkey is cooked properly – buy a meat thermometer. They are available in the housewares section of most supermarkets. Follow the instructions below for proper use and you will know when your turkey is cooked.

According to the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** and many recipes, turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

Whole Turkey: To check the internal temperature of the turkey, insert the tip of a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh (the part of the turkey that takes longest to cook). Place it above the lower part of the thigh bone (but not touching the bone), pointing it toward the body. To check the stuffing temperature, insert the tip of the thermometer into the center of the body cavity. (See **Butterball video showing proper use of a meat thermometer**--to determine if a turkey is completely cooked.)

Whole Breast and Boneless Turkey Roasts: Similar to the whole turkey, you should insert your thermometer deep into thickest part of the meat, not touching any bone.

Instant Read Thermometers: Remove the turkey from the oven and place the thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, away from the bone. It will register the temperature of your turkey within 15 seconds. If it needs more time, be sure to remove the thermometer before returning the turkey to the oven. (Instant read thermometers were not designed to withstand hours of high temperatures.)

QUICK TIP

Bone conducts heat differently than the meat of the bird, so if a thermometer touches bone, it may give a false reading.



Oven Safe Thermometer: The only type of thermometer that's safe to leave inserted in the turkey during the entire cooking process is an **Oven Safe Thermometer**. Insert the thermometer in the deepest part of the thigh before you put the raw turkey in the oven. Check the temperature dial periodically while it roasts. If the thermometer gets bumped while the turkey is in the oven, simply reposition it.

IS IT DONE YET?

You've done all the preparations: the turkey is in the oven, side dishes are prepared, the table is set. Family and friends are ready for the best Thanksgiving meal ever. But, like a weary child from the backseat during a cross-country trip, the most important question nags at you: Are we there yet? Is the turkey done?

Here are five ways to check:

1. **It's the right temperature.** Turkey and stuffing are safe to eat when the internal temperature of the turkey is 165°F or higher confirmed by an instant-read meat thermometer.
2. **It's golden brown.** The skin of the turkey often browns early in the baking process, so this alone won't tell you it's done, but it's a delicious indicator that you're getting closer.
3. **It has been in the oven for the recommended time (and at the recommended temperature).** This is one case when reading the directions will save all kinds of heartache (and possible tummy aches!). Your turkey likely came with specific instructions on thawing and cooking the bird. If not, refer to this guide or **the USDA handy website** on safely cooking turkey.
4. **The drumstick wiggles.** When you gently tug on the end of the drumstick, the turkey leg will wiggle easily, with almost no resistance. If you have to force the drumstick away from the body of the bird, it's not ready yet.



5. **The juices run clear.** It's time to give the turkey a poke. Insert a knife at least an inch into the breast. When you remove it, look for lovely turkey juices to come bubbling up. If the juices are clear, the meat is cooked. If they are cloudy or pink, it needs more time in the oven. (Remember to save those wonderful juices for later when you remove the turkey from the pan – they are a great base for gravy!)

Finally: Let it rest. As anxious as everyone is to dig in, you'll be even more thankful if you let the turkey rest for at least 20 minutes (up to 40 minutes for large turkeys) after you take it out of the oven. This allows the turkey juices to be re-absorbed for moister meat--and not lost on the plate as you carve.

To rest the turkey, let it sit on a heatproof surface and drape it with a loose tent of aluminum foil while you get all the accoutrements ready to serve.



PART THREE: OTHER TURKEY ESSENTIALS

CARVING THE TURKEY

After you've let the bird rest for 20 minutes, it's time to remove the stuffing (if it's inside the bird) and carve the turkey so you can eat it!

To prepare the carving surface, place a slightly damp kitchen towel under a large cutting board (so the board doesn't move as you're carving). If you have a cutting board with gutters along the edges to catch the juice, use it.

Assemble the following:

- A warmed serving platter (for the turkey).
- Sharpened 10-inch slicing knife (no serrated knives—they tear the meat).
- Carving fork to arrange and serve the meat.
- Kitchen shears.

QUICK TIP

The whole bird may be beautiful, but it's better to carve your turkey in the kitchen and bring it to the table already cut up on a serving platter.



Follow these basic steps to carve the turkey. For visual instruction, see Martha Stewart's **How to Carve a Turkey** or **Howcast's How to Carve a Turkey**:

1. **Start with the dark meat – legs and thighs.** Pull each drumstick away from the bird while using the knife to separate them from the thigh. (You may need to score the bone at the joint and separate there or kitchen shears may help.) Separate the thigh meat from the bone in one piece, if possible, and slice the thigh meat against the grain. Set slices and drumsticks on the platter.
2. **Remove the wings.** Pull each wing away from the body of the turkey using your sharp carving knife to separate it at the joints. Place wings on the platter.
3. **Remove and slice the breast meat.** Start at the top of the breast. Place the knife up against the breast bone. Cut down along the breast bone on each side, to remove the breast meat in two halves, one large piece from each side of the breast bone. Then lay out each breast half on the cutting board with skin facing up. Slice against the grain into thick slices and place on the serving platter.
4. **When you are done carving, cover the full serving platter with aluminum foil to retain heat and moisture.** If possible, hold the turkey temperature at 140°F or higher in a heat-holding device like a high crock-pot, chafing dish, electric frying pan, griddle, warming drawer, or steam table.

QUICK TIP

For food safety reasons, from the time you take the turkey out of the oven, you have two hours to serve it, eat it, and then refrigerate or freeze the leftovers –this includes the turkey, stuffing, and gravy.



MAKING GRAVY

Homemade gravy for the turkey, stuffing, and mashed potatoes is one of the highlights of Thanksgiving! (For more details on making gravy, see [Making Turkey Gravy](#) from Allrecipes.)

Be sure to use the drippings from the roasting pan for full flavored gravy and use a homemade or good quality canned stock.

1. You can either transfer drippings to a pot to make the gravy, or once the turkey is removed, you can put the whole roasting pan on one or two burners of the stove.
2. Simmer turkey pan juices while you stir. At this point, don't walk away from the stove until the gravy is finished and the burner turned off.
3. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour and stir well until thick and to remove lumps.
4. Add 1-2 cups of broth, leaving it on the flame and whisking until the gravy thickens. Lower the heat if the gravy starts to stick, bubble, or burn.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Thin with broth, if needed. Turn off the burner and put the gravy in a boat or other serving dish. Enjoy eating your Thanksgiving meal!

QUICK TIP

Transfer turkey carcasses, skin and trimmings into the stock pot immediately, or quickly break down, bag and place into the freezer for future stock making.



IDEAS FOR LEFTOVERS

For food safety reasons, from the time you take the turkey out of the oven, you have two hours to serve it, eat it, and then refrigerate or freeze the leftovers –this includes the turkey, stuffing, and gravy. Why just two hours? Because bacteria that cause food poisoning can multiply to dangerous levels on perishable food left longer than two hours at room temperature.

So to preserve the holiday turkey safely, do not dawdle. After dinner--but before dessert--remove the meat from the bones, cut large pieces into small pieces, and store in airtight containers. (That's because food in small amounts will get cold more quickly, which is important.)

Leftover turkey will keep in the refrigerator for three to four days. Stuffing and gravy should be used within one or two days. Just to be on the safe side, you should reheat leftover gravy to a rolling boil before serving.

If you'd like to extend your turkey leftovers into the new year, put your airtight packages of cooked turkey in the freezer, with the date clearly marked. That will give you up to six months to find just the right recipe for leftovers.

You'll find lots of recipes for leftover turkey online:

- [**30 Genius Ways To Eat Leftover Thanksgiving Turkey.**](#) Delish.
- [**Best Thanksgiving Leftover Recipes.**](#) Food Network.
- [**20 Leftover Turkey Recipes You Can Make in 60 Minutes or Less.**](#) Good Housekeeping.
- [**24 Leftover Turkey Recipes That'll Upstage Your Thanksgiving Feast.**](#) Woman's Day.



ENJOY YOUR THANKSGIVING FEAST!

Hopefully this guide has demonstrated that preparing a turkey for a family Thanksgiving can be easy, delicious and fun whether it's a table for two or a gaggle of relatives and friends. A beautifully browned turkey as the center of your holiday meal is something to look forward to – and the leftovers can be even better.

**gThankYou wishes you a
delectable holiday, and best
wishes for your family feast!**



PART FOUR: OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **Let's Talk Turkey.** United States Department of Agriculture.
- **Turkey Triage.** Whole Foods Market.
- **Turkey Confidential** (troubleshooting Thanksgiving meal), The Splendid Table.
- **How to Fix 13 Common Thanksgiving Problems,** Real Simple.
- **Thanksgiving,** Martha Stewart.
- **Thanksgiving,** Food Network.



PUT THE THANKS IN THANKSGIVING WITH THE GIFT OF A TURKEY

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday and the one day a year we treat everyone as family. The gift of the turkey centerpiece of the Thanksgiving celebration is a truly meaningful gift that everyone appreciates.

gThankYou makes turkey gift-giving easy with Gift Certificates for any brand and preparation of whole turkey — redeemable at major chain grocery stores anywhere in the U.S.



All our Gift Certificates come with free gift Enclosure Cards which can be personalized with your message of appreciation and thanks. We can even incorporate an organization logo or signature scan.

And, nearly all orders ship same day so during the busy holiday season, you have your gift in time.



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CONTACT US

gThankYou, LLC is located in Madison, Wisconsin

Contact: Rick Kiley, Chief ThankYou! Officer

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Call Toll-Free at 888.484.1658

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LEARN MORE ABOUT GTHANKYOU

gThankYou has been around for over 12 years helping companies thank and celebrate employees and customers with easy, meaningful and affordable Certificates of Gratitude for items such as a Thanksgiving turkey or Christmas ham.

Learn more about us by visiting our **website** and watching our **"About Us"** video.

We would be honored to help you celebrate your workplace this holiday season.

