



## TURKEY TIPS FOR A SAFE HOLIDAY

**PLAN AHEAD** - Early planning and shopping will help ease the countdown tension for your Thanksgiving meal. Ask yourself the following questions: *Do you want a fresh or frozen turkey? Do you have enough space to store a frozen bird if purchased in advance? If not, when should you purchase a turkey? What size bird do you need to buy?*

**FRESH OR FROZEN** - There is no appreciable difference between a fresh or frozen bird. It is just a personal preference. Be sure to wash your hands after shopping and after storing raw meat and poultry. Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys. USDA recommends only buying frozen, pre-stuffed turkeys that display the USDA or State mark of inspection on the packaging. These turkeys are safe because they have been processed under controlled conditions. Do not thaw before cooking. Cook from the frozen state and follow package directions for proper handling and cooking.

**WHEN TO PURCHASE** - A frozen bird may be purchased at any time but make sure you have adequate storage space in your freezer. If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure you purchase it only 1-2 days before cooking. Whether you buy a frozen or a fresh turkey, never purchase a turkey that is displayed out of refrigeration.

**WHAT SIZE TO PURCHASE** - Allow 1 pound per person for a whole bird. A boneless breast of turkey will serve  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound per person and a breast of turkey,  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound per person.

### THAWING THE TURKEY

**In the refrigerator** - Place frozen bird in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40 °F) on a tray or in a shallow pan to catch any drippings during the thawing process. Allow approximately 24 hours per 5 pounds of turkey. After thawing, keep turkey refrigerated for only 1-2 days. Make sure you remove the giblets from the turkey cavities after thawing. The giblets should be cooked separately.

**In cold water** - If you forget to thaw the turkey, don't panic. You can submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey.

**In microwave** - Microwave thawing is safe if the turkey is not too large. Check the manufacturer's instructions for the size turkey that will fit into your oven, the minutes per pound and power level to use for thawing. *Cook the turkey immediately after thawing in the microwave.*

## PREPARATION

**Remember, always wash hands, utensils, the sink, kitchen counters and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and hot water.**

**The day before Thanksgiving** - Check to see that you have all the ingredients you need to prepare your holiday meal. Make sure you have all the equipment you need, including a roasting pan large enough to hold the turkey and a meat thermometer. The turkey may be rinsed in cold water the night before and rewrapped for roasting the next day. Be sure to wash your hands after handling raw poultry. Wet and dry stuffing ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated separately or done the next day. Mix ingredients just before placing the stuffing into a casserole dish or if you insist, into the bird.

**Thanksgiving day** - Use the chart below to judge the cooking time. The times listed are for a fresh or thawed turkey in an oven at 325 °F. These times are approximate. Use a meat thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey. When the temperature of the thigh has reached 180 °F, the rest of the bird should be 165 °F. Check the temperature in several locations to be sure the bird has reached 165 °F. All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165 °F. When the turkey is removed from the oven, let it stand 20 minutes before carving. The stuffing, whether cooked inside the turkey or cooked in a separate dish should reach a temperature of 165 °F.

**If you insist on stuffing the turkey** - Be sure the stuffing is moist, not dry (heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment). Do not pack the stuffing into the bird but spoon it into the cavity lightly so the stuffing will cook evenly. Stuff the turkey immediately before placing the bird in the oven.

**Approximate cooking times** - This time chart is based on fresh or completely thawed turkeys at a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below. The cooking time for a frozen turkey will take at least 50 percent longer than the time for a fully thawed turkey. These cooking times are only a guide. Be sure and use a food thermometer to determine the safe doneness of the turkey.



Size of Turkey	Hours for Unstuffed Turkey	Hours for Stuffed Turkey
8 – 12 pounds	2 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> - 3	3-3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
12 – 14 pounds	3 - 3 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> - 4
14 – 18 pounds	3 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> - 4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	4-4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
18 – 20 pounds	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> - 4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> -4 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>
20 – 24 pounds	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> - 5	4 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> -5 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>

**Cooking a turkey in a deep fat fryer** - This is a popular method for cooking a small turkey. You will need a special deep fat fryer and a propane tank for fuel. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for using the equipment. The instructions will include information on the amount and type of fat to use, the maximum size of bird the equipment will accommodate and approximate cooking time. Deep fat frying a turkey should only be done outdoors and special safety considerations must be followed. Specific information can be found in the equipment owner's manual or on line at [www.hormel.com](http://www.hormel.com) . At the search menu, scroll down to *Search Knowledge* and click, then type in Deep-Frying Turkey.

**Using a food thermometer** - A food thermometer is the only reliable way to ensure safety and to determine the "doneness" of meat, poultry and egg products. To be safe, these foods must be cooked to an internal temperature high enough to destroy any harmful microorganisms that may be in the food. There are a variety of food thermometers available to the home cook. The most popular and affordable thermometer is the Instant-Read, Bimetal Thermometer. It can be used to measure the temperature of a variety of food in about 15 to 20 seconds. It is not designed to remain in the food while it is cooking in the oven and is meant to be used near the end of the cooking time to check on final temperatures. The head of the thermometer is attached to the stem or prob. The probe must be inserted the full length of the sensing area (usually 2 to 3 inches above the point end of the probe. For information on other types of food thermometers, go to: [www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/kitchen.htm](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oa/thermy/kitchen.htm) .

**Calibrating an instant read thermometer** - Models where the head is attached with a hex adjusting nut can be calibrated. To calibrate the thermometer, make a slush of crushed ice and water. Insert the stem of the thermometer in the mixture and wait 15 to 20 seconds. The thermometer should read 32 °F, if not, adjust the hex nut until the thermometer reads 32 °F. You should calibrate a thermometer whenever it is dropped or after extremely high or extremely low temperatures are measured.

**Storing leftovers** - Do not let foods sit at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Cut turkey off the bones. Refrigerate stuffing and turkey in shallow containers. Use leftover gravy within 1 to 2 days and leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days. If you plan to freeze leftovers, place them in freezer containers, label and freeze for a maximum of 2 to 6 months for best quality. Remember, the refrigerator freezer is designed for short term storage (a maximum of 6 weeks). Long term storage will result in freezer burn and damage the quality of the food. For long term storage, place items in a deep freezer at a temperature of 0 °F or lower.

**Reheating leftovers** - Only reheat the amount of leftovers you intend to use at that meal. Reheat all leftovers to an internal temperature of 165 °F. Foods reheated in the microwave should set a few minutes to even out the temperature. Be sure to reheat these foods in the microwave to an internal temperature of 165 °F.



## POULTRY: Basting, Brining and Marinating

Several methods have become popular in recent years, which involve the use of a liquid to change or improve the flavor, taste, tenderness, or texture of poultry. Various liquids can be added to poultry by many different methods such as injection, marinating, brining, or basting. Some of these products can be purchased ready to cook for convenience, and others can be prepared at home.

**Marinating** - A marinade is a savory acidic sauce in which a food is soaked to enrich its flavor or to tenderize it. A marinade usually consists of a cooking oil, an acid (vinegar, lemon juice, wine), and spices. As the food stands in the mixture, the acid and the oil impart the savory flavors of the spices to the food. The acid in marinades causes poultry tissue to break down causing a tenderizing effect. The breaking down of the tissue also causes the poultry to hold more liquid, making it juicier. Too much vinegar or hot sauce in a marinade can have the opposite effect, causing the meat to be stringy and tough.

**Safe Preparation:** Whole poultry or poultry parts may be marinated by completely immersing the poultry into the marinade. To help infuse the marinade into the poultry, you may use a fork to make random holes. A needle-like injector may also be used.

Poultry can be refrigerated for up to 2 days in a marinade. For easy cleanup, use food-safe plastic bags during storage and discard the bags after marinating. Food-grade plastic, stainless steel, or glass containers may also be used to marinate food. Cover poultry during storage in the refrigerator. Don't use marinade from raw poultry as a sauce unless it is boiled first to destroy bacteria. Don't reuse leftover marinade. (*If stuffing poultry, always marinate the poultry first, then stuff and cook immediately.*)

**Brining** - Brine is a strong solution of water and salt. A sweetener such as sugar, molasses, honey, or corn syrup may be added to the solution for flavor and to improve browning. The salt has two effects on poultry. It dissolves protein in muscle, and the salt and protein reduce moisture loss during cooking. This makes the meat juicier, more tender, and improves the flavor. The low levels of salt enhance the other natural flavors of poultry.

**Safe Preparation:** To prepare the brining solution, dissolve salt in cold or room temperature water by mixing thoroughly. Cover and refrigerate overnight before adding the poultry. A sweetener may be added to offset the salt flavor or to impart a sweet flavor to the poultry. Sugar or molasses are often used as a sweetener. The amount of sweetener added is a personal preference.

To prepare a brine solution for poultry, add  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup salt to 1 gallon of water, or 3 tablespoons of salt per quart of water. For best flavor, use table salt. Add sweetener if desired. Place brining solution in food-grade plastic, stainless steel, or glass containers; cover and refrigerate overnight. Totally submerge poultry in solution and store covered in the refrigerator. For best results, refrigerate at least overnight. Poultry may be left in the refrigerator up to 2 days after thawed or purchased fresh. Remove poultry from brine. Discard brine after use. (*If stuffing poultry, brine the poultry first, then stuff and cook immediately.*)

**Basting** - Melted butter or other fat, meat drippings, or liquid such as a stock is spooned or brushed on food as it cooks to moisten it. A bulb baster can also be used to drizzle the liquid over the food. Basting adds flavor and color, and prevents poultry from drying out.

**Safe Preparation:** When basting poultry, always use clean utensils to avoid cross-contamination.

**Cleaning Procedures:**

**Cutting Boards** - Clean cutting boards with soap and hot water and sanitize with a bleach water solution. For the bleach water solution, use 1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water. This is especially important when raw poultry has been used on a cutting board.

**Hand Washing** - Wash your hands using soap and hot water rubbing your hands together to develop a good lather, making sure you clean between the fingers and underneath fingernails, for at least 20 seconds. Dry your hands using a clean towel.

---

This information is brought to you by:

Ruben Oropeza, REHS, Environmental Management Coordinator, Napa Environmental Health, 253-4471

Marciel Klenk, CFCS, Nutrition, Family & Consumer Science Advisor, UC Cooperative Extension, 253-4221

Mark Caro, Ph.D., Safety Officer, County of Napa

November 2004