

Thanksgiving Recipes

FROM CHEF JOHN



I hope you enjoy these recipes and try some of them for your Thanksgiving dinner this year. If we can do anything to help make your culinary experience less stressful, please don't hesitate to call upon us to help you with a recipe problem, turkey disaster, lumpy gravy, or you just need someone to walk you through cooking your first Thanksgiving dinner.

*Many blessings this Thanksgiving
and thank you for contacting us at Mezzaluna.*

Thanksgiving Timeline

While some home cooks have years of experience preparing a Thanksgiving dinner, there are just as many who are roasting a turkey for the first time. With that in mind, here is a timeline to help you plan and prepare the feast. We recommend that you begin planning and shopping a week or two in advance. Then you'll be better able to relax and enjoy the pleasures of cooking for family and friends.

1 to 2 Weeks Before Thanksgiving

1. Confirm the number of guests and plan your menu.
2. Order the appropriate-size turkey.
3. Plan your table setting, serving dishes and decorations.
4. Read through all the recipes and make your preliminary shopping lists and "to-do" lists.
5. Shop for any essential cooks' tools, cooking equipment and tableware you'll need.
6. Take table linens to the dry cleaner for cleaning and pressing.

A Few Days Before Thanksgiving

1. Finalize your shopping lists.
2. Shop for staples, produce and other fresh foods.
3. Prepare any food that can be made in advance, such as pie pastry and cranberry sauce.
4. If you purchased a frozen turkey, begin thawing it out in the refrigerator.

The Day Before Thanksgiving

1. If you ordered a fresh turkey, pick it up or have it delivered.
2. Complete your food shopping.
3. Make turkey stock for gravy and dressing.
4. Chop ingredients for the dressing, such as onions and celery; refrigerate in covered bowls or plastic bags.
5. Chop the herbs for various dishes; refrigerate in covered bowls or plastic bags.
6. Bake the pies and tarts.
7. Chill the wines and water.

The Evening Before Thanksgiving

1. Cut fresh bread into chunks for the dressing; leave out overnight to dry.
2. Set the table.
3. Organize the before-dinner drinks.
4. Organize the tea and coffee service.
5. Determine what time the turkey will go into the oven (see our tip for Roasting the Turkey).
6. Organize the serving dishes.
7. Get a good night's sleep!

Thanksgiving Day

Early Morning

1. Have breakfast and organize your day.
2. Confirm the time to remove the turkey from the refrigerator and the time to put it in the oven.
3. Peel and cut the potatoes; set them in cold water.

4 to 5 Hours Before Dinner

1. While the oven preheats, prepare the turkey for roasting.
2. Place the turkey in the oven at the determined time.
3. Prepare the dressing.
4. Check the table setting to make sure all is in order.

1 to 2 Hours Before Dinner

1. Cook the potatoes.
2. Put the cranberry sauce on the table.
3. Serve drinks and hors d'oeuvres to guests.

45 Minutes to 1 Hour Before Dinner

1. When the turkey is done, transfer to a warmed platter and cover with aluminum foil.
2. Finish preparing the dressing, then bake the dressing and cook or reheat side dishes.
3. Make the gravy.
4. Mash the potatoes.
5. Place the dinner plates in the warm oven.
6. Seat your guests, carve the turkey and serve dinner.



All About Turkey

Purchasing a Turkey

Preparing a turkey takes planning, especially during the hectic holiday season.

1. Before buying your turkey, make room in your refrigerator and find a platter or container big enough to put the uncooked turkey on so any leaking juices won't contaminate other foods in the refrigerator.
2. At the store, buy the turkey last, put it in a separate plastic bag to avoid contaminating other foods, and refrigerate it immediately when you get home. If you are combining food shopping with other holiday shopping, make the grocery store the last stop so food will not be left in the car.

How much Turkey do I need?

1. The general rule of thumb is one pound of turkey for each person. But let's face it, we want leftovers for turkey sandwiches the next day, right? So I say, buy big! The following chart can guide you:

| To Serve | Turkey Size |
|--------------|-------------|
| 2-4 people | 8-12 lbs. |
| 5-7 people | 12-16 lbs. |
| 8-10 people | 16-20 lbs. |
| 11-13 people | 20-24 lbs. |

Thawing

If buying a frozen turkey, the safest way to defrost it is in the refrigerator, but keep in mind you need to allow 24 hours of defrosting for every 5 pounds of turkey.

1. For Thanksgiving, that means a 20-pound frozen turkey needs to start defrosting on Sunday.
2. Don't defrost the turkey on the counter and be sure to leave the turkey in its original wrapper.
3. Turkeys can be defrosted in cold water, but the water should be changed every 30 minutes and allow 30 minutes of defrosting per pound of turkey.

Buy your fresh turkey only one to two days before you plan to cook it. Most whole turkeys are frozen when you buy them. Use this chart as a guide for thawing:

| Turkey Size | Thawing time in refrigerator |
|-------------|------------------------------|
| 8-12 lbs. | 1-2 days |
| 12-16 lbs. | 2-3 days |
| 12-16 lbs | 3 - 4 days |
| 16-20 lbs. | 3 1/2-4 1/2 days |
| 20-24 lbs. | 4-5 days |

Prior to Cooking

1. Before preparing the turkey, clear and thoroughly clean the counter, as well as the cooking equipment that you may not have used since preparing last year's turkey.
2. Clean immediately with hot soapy water anything, including sponges and hands that touch the raw turkey or juice.
3. Sanitize sponges by running them through your dishwasher or by placing them in the microwave on high for 30 seconds.

Cooking your Turkey

The key to roasting turkey is to keep the breast meat moist without overcooking the legs.

1. Preheat your oven to 325 degrees.
2. Release the legs from the leg lock. The neck and giblets should be removed from the body and neck cavities.
3. Rinse the turkey both inside and out with cool water and pat it dry with paper towels.
4. Now you are ready to season your bird.
5. When you're through, put the legs back into the leg lock and tuck the tips of the wings under the back of the turkey.
6. Place the turkey, breast side up, in a shallow (2" deep) roasting pan.
7. Brush the turkey with melted butter and season liberally with kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper.
8. Shield the breast loosely with a tent-shaped piece of aluminum foil to prevent over-browning and roast the turkey until a meat thermometer registers 165 degrees in the thigh.
9. A whole turkey is properly cooked if the leg joint moves freely when the drumstick is rotated and the juices run clear (without any tinge of pink) when inserting a long-tined fork into the deepest part of the leg joint.
10. Remove the foil when approximately 1 1/2 hours of cooking time remains to allow the turkey to brown.
11. Move the turkey to a warmed platter; cover it loosely and let it rest for 15-30 minutes before carving. This allows the juices to settle and redistribute.

Here are approximate cooking times for turkey, but use a meat thermometer to verify doneness:

| Weight | Unstuffed Cooking Time |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 8 – 12 lbs. | 2¾ – 3 hours |
| 12 – 14 lbs. | 3 – 3¾ hours |
| 14 – 18 lbs. | 4¼ – 4½ hours |
| 18 – 20 lbs. | 4¼ – 4½ hours |
| 20 – 24 lbs. | 4½ – 5 hours |

Basting

To baste or not to baste...that is the question! People mistakenly think that basting the turkey will make it moister. Not true—basting only affects the turkey's skin making it more flavorful and crispy, but the juices don't really reach the meat. Instead of basting...

1. Prepare a flavored butter with garlic, shallots, citrus zest and fresh herbs like parsley, rosemary, thyme and sage.
2. Prior to roasting, simply separate the skin from the breast and leg areas of the turkey with your hand.
3. Take the butter mixture and apply it generously between the skin and the meat.
4. As the bird roasts in the oven the flavors of the garlic, butter and herbs will give your turkey a tender, moist, aromatic flavor.

Resting

When you remove your turkey from the oven cover it with aluminum foil and allow the poor bird to rest for 15-30 minutes while you finish making the gravy. If you start carving right out of the oven, the natural juices from the meat will run onto the cutting board leaving it dry. Resting allows the Turkey's natural juices to reabsorb so that when you do slice into it, your turkey will be juicier.

Carving your Turkey

To get the most white meat from your bird...

1. First remove the drumstick and thigh by pulling the leg away from body and cutting at the joint.
2. Next place the knife parallel to and as close to the wing as possible.
3. Make a base cut into the breast.
4. Slice the breast by carving downward, ending at the base cut.
5. Keep slices thin and even. Always remember to work on a clean cutting surface.
6. If you're confused, call me and I can talk you through it. (503-442-1111)

Leftovers

Thanksgiving usually means lots of leftovers. Although you may not feel like doing much after a big meal, be sure to refrigerate or freeze leftovers within two hours of cooking the food. Separate leftovers into shallow containers. Turkey should be removed from the bone and stored separately from the stuffing and gravy. Use leftovers within 4 days, except stuffing and gravy, which should be used within 2 days. If that seems like an impossible feat, freeze the leftovers. **To serve the feast again, reheat leftovers to 165 F and boil soups, sauces, and gravies.**

My Favorite Roasted Brined Turkey

Serves 10 to 12

Ingredients

1 (14 to 16 pound) fresh young turkey

For the brine:

1 cup kosher salt

1/2 cup light brown sugar

1 gallon chicken stock or canned broth

1 tablespoon black peppercorns

1/2 tablespoon allspice berries

1/2 tablespoon candied ginger

1 gallon iced water

For the aromatics:

1 red apple, sliced

1/2 onion, sliced

1 cinnamon stick

1 cup water

4 sprigs fresh rosemary

6 leaves sage

Canola oil

Procedure

1. Combine all brine ingredients, except ice water, in a stockpot, and bring to a boil. Stir to dissolve solids, then remove from heat, cool to room temperature, and refrigerate until thoroughly chilled.
2. The night before cooking, combine the brine and ice water in a clean 5-gallon bucket. Place thawed turkey breast side down in brine, cover, and refrigerate overnight.
3. A few minutes before roasting, heat oven to 500 degrees. Combine the apple, onion, cinnamon stick, and cup of water in a microwave safe dish and microwave on high for 5 minutes.
4. Remove bird from brine and rinse inside and out with cold water. Discard brine.
5. Place bird on roasting rack inside wide, low pan and pat dry with paper towels. Add steeped aromatics to cavity along with rosemary and sage. Tuck back wings and coat whole bird liberally with canola (or other neutral) oil.
6. Roast on lowest level of the oven at 500 degrees F. for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and cover breast with double layer of aluminum foil, reducing temperature to 350 degrees F. Remove from oven when thermometer reaches 165 degrees F.
7. Let turkey rest, loosely covered for 15-30 minutes before carving.

Stuffing or Dressing ?

Many people feel that stuffing is the best part of the turkey, but I advocate not cooking it in the bird, rather bake the stuffing (which is called *dressing* at this point) in the oven. You can drizzle the dressing with drippings from the turkey, which make it incredibly flavorful and give it a crisp, crunchy topping.

If you simply must stuff the poor bird, take care. Bacteria from eggs and shellfish in the stuffing or the turkey itself can contaminate stuffing. The safest way to cook stuffing/dressing is on the stove or in the oven, but separate from the turkey.

If cooking the stuffing inside the bird, loosely stuff the turkey just before you stick it in the oven with cup stuffing per pound of turkey. Use a meat thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches 165 F. A "pop-up" thermometer that comes with a turkey won't tell you the temperature of the stuffing. Avoid pre-stuffed fresh turkeys.

Apple and Sausage Dressing

Serves 8

Ingredients

1 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) butter
5 cups chopped onion (about 3 large)
2 cups chopped celery
8 cups diced cored tart green apples (such as Granny Smith)
1 tablespoon dried rubbed sage
2 teaspoons dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
5 1/2 cups herbed cubed stuffing mix (about 10 ounces)

Procedure

1. Sauté sausage in heavy large skillet over medium-high heat until cooked through, crumbling sausage with back of spoon, about 10 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer sausage to large bowl.
2. Add butter, onions and celery to skillet; sauté until onions are tender, about 15 minutes.
3. Add apples; sauté until apples are tender but still hold shape, about 10 minutes.
4. Add sage, thyme and allspice; sauté 1 minute. Add to sausage. Stir in stuffing mix.
5. Season with salt and pepper. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover; chill.)
6. Preheat oven to 325°F. Generously butter 5x10-inch glass baking dish. Transfer dressing to prepared dish. Bake until heated through, about 40 minutes. For incredible flavor, drizzle turkey drippings over the dressing while it bakes. Wonderful!

Let's Make Gravy!

I know many of you are intimidated to make gravy in the rush to get dinner on the table. But homemade gravy tastes more flavorful than canned or instant, and really is quite simple to prepare. So rally the troops to carve the turkey and finish the side dishes while you make the gravy

Here's my favorite recipe for no-fail gravy that can be made ahead of time.

Brandy Gravy

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

One 1½ -ounce container veal or chicken demi-glace (can be purchased at Zupan's Market)

1 tablespoon brandy

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1/2 cup heavy cream

Procedure

1. In small saucepan over moderately high heat, combine demi-glace, 1/2 cup water, and brandy.
2. Bring to boil, stirring until smooth. Stir in butter, reduce heat, and simmer uncovered, stirring often, until gravy thickens, about 1 minute.
3. Stir in cream and season with freshly ground pepper. Serve hot, over turkey and stuffing.

Pumpkin Pie

As a chef, I encourage people to make homemade foods instead of purchasing pre-made items from the grocery store. However, picking up your pumpkin pie from a reputable local bakery *can* save you time. Instead of serving your pie plain, try dressing it up a little with a fantastic, crunchy topping I've made for nearly 30 years. And no—I'm not as old as you think!

Chef John's Pumpkin Walnut-Brown Sugar Crunch Pie Topping

Ingredients

1 1/4 cups coarsely chopped walnuts

3/4 cups packed brown sugar

6 tablespoons butter, melted

Procedure

1. Combine melted butter, nuts, toffee bits and sugar; stir until moistened.
2. Sprinkle over cooled pie. Broil about 5 inches from heat for 2 to 3 minutes or until bubbly. Cool before serving. Delicious!

Easy Pumpkin Pie

Want to make a pumpkin pie but do not have spices on hand? Libby's Easy Pumpkin Pie Mix to the rescue! All you need to bake this treat is a 5 fl.-oz. can of evaporated milk, 2 large eggs and a 9-inch deep-dish pie shell.

Ingredients

1 can (30 oz.) LIBBY'S Easy Pumpkin Pie Mix
2/3-cup (5 fl.-oz can) evaporated milk
2 large eggs, beaten
1 unbaked 9-inch (4-cup volume) deep-dish pie shell

Procedure

1. Combine pumpkin pie mix, evaporated milk and eggs in large bowl.
2. Pour into pie shell.
3. Bake in preheated 425°F. oven for 15 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350° F.; bake 50 to 60 minutes or until knife inserted near center comes out clean.
4. Cool on wire rack for 2 hours. Serve immediately or refrigerate.

Cranberry Sauce

Homemade cranberry sauce is so easy to prepare and the fresh flavor and texture is incredible. Buy a bag of fresh cranberries at your local grocery store. Turn the bag over and find the recipe on the back. It usually calls for sugar, water, and maybe the zest of an orange. It takes just minutes to make and can be done a week ahead of time.

Here's a simple cranberry sauce recipe:

Whole-Berry Cranberry Sauce

Ingredients

1-pound fresh cranberries
1-cup water
1-cup sugar

Procedure

1. Combine all ingredients in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil, cover, then turn to medium heat.
2. Continue cooking until all the berries pop.
3. Remove from heat and let cool. Refrigerate until cold, or serve warm.

Fresh Cranberry-Orange Relish

Ingredients:

1 12-ounce package fresh cranberries, rinsed and drained
1 unpeeled orange, cut into eighths and seeded
3/4-1 cup sugar

Procedure:

1. Place half the cranberries and half the orange slices in food processor container. Process until mixture is evenly chopped. Transfer to a bowl.
2. Repeat with remaining cranberries and orange slices. Stir in sugar. Store in refrigerator or freezer. Makes about 3 cups.

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Bacon and Chestnuts

Serves 6

Ingredients:

6 oz. bacon, diced
5 shallots, minced
4 lb. Brussels sprouts, halved lengthwise
1 cup roughly chopped roasted and peeled chestnuts (fresh or jarred)
2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Procedure:

1. Preheat an oven to 425°F.
2. In a large roasting pan or ovenproof sauté pan over medium heat, cook the bacon until crisp, 5 to 8 minutes.
3. Add the shallots and cook until soft, about 2 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high, add the Brussels sprouts, chestnuts, thyme, salt and pepper and stir well.
4. Transfer the pan to the oven and roast for 15 minutes, then stir the ingredients.
5. Continue roasting until the Brussels sprouts are tender, about 10 minutes more. Transfer to a serving dish and serve immediately.

Roasted Squash Puree with Ginger

A bowl of creamy squash puree is one of the comfort foods of the autumn table. Although squash is often boiled, roasting brings out its sweetness. Acorn, Hubbard, turban squash or pumpkin can be used in place of the butternut squash.

Serves 6.

Ingredients:

1 butternut squash, 2 1/2 to 3 lb.
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature
1/2 cup milk
1 1/2 tsp. peeled and grated fresh ginger
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Procedure:

1. Preheat an oven to 400°F. Lightly oil a baking sheet.
2. Cut the squash in half through the stem end and place, cut sides down, on the prepared baking sheet.
3. Bake until easily pierced with a knife, 45 to 50 minutes.
4. Remove from the oven and set aside until cool enough to handle. Using a spoon, scoop out the seeds and fibers and discard. Spoon the flesh into a bowl and keep warm.
5. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine the butter and milk and heat until the butter melts and the milk is hot, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat.
6. Using a potato masher, mash the squash until smooth. Alternately, process the squash in a food processor fitted with the metal blade, pulsing several times until smooth, about 1 minute.
7. Stir in the milk mixture and ginger and season with salt and pepper.
8. Transfer to a heavy saucepan and place over low heat. Reheat gently, stirring to prevent scorching.

Spoon into a warmed serving bowl and serve immediately.

Pumpkin Squares

Great with coffee! Makes 24 bars

Ingredients:

1 cup Flour, sifted
½ cup quick cooking rolled oats
½ cup firmly packed brown sugar
1 stick Butter
2 cups canned pumpkin
13½ oz evaporated milk
¾ cup Sugar
2 eggs
½ tsp salt
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp ground ginger
¼ tsp ground cloves

for topping

½ cup chopped pecans
½ cup brown sugar
2 T. butter

Procedure:

1. Combine flour, oats, brown sugar and butter in a bowl.
2. Mix until crumbly, using an electric mixer on low speed.
3. Press into an ungreased 13x9x2" pan.
4. Bake at 350-f oven for 15 minutes.
5. Combine pumpkin, milk, eggs, white sugar, salt and spices in a mixing bowl-beat well. Pour into baked crust.
6. Bake for another 20 minutes on 350 f.
7. Combine pecans, brown sugar and butter. Sprinkle over pumpkin filling and put back in the oven for another 15-20 minutes, or until filling is set.
8. Cool in pan on a rack, then cut and serve.