

November 2012

Fresh or frozen turkey: Ready for Thanksgiving

Madison, Wis.--Perhaps the biggest holiday meal of the year is just around the corner. Thanksgiving brings families together from all across the state to share a meal that often centers on roast turkey and all the fixings. To help you prepare the holiday meal, University of Wisconsin-Extension food scientist Barbara Ingham offers some helpful hints.

“Whether you choose a fresh or frozen turkey is up to you,” says Ingham. “But for both fresh and frozen, allow one pound of turkey per person.”

If the turkey is fresh, buy it only one to two days before you plan to cook it, and store it in the refrigerator until you are ready to place it in the oven. Place a fresh turkey in a pan or on a tray to catch any juices that may leak. “Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys,” advises Ingham

If your turkey is frozen, keep it frozen until you’re ready to thaw it. “There are three ways to safely thaw your turkey: in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in a microwave oven,” says Ingham.

Thawing your turkey

--**Refrigerator** (40°F or below): Keep the turkey in its original wrapper. Thaw on a tray or in a pan to prevent drips. Once it is completely thawed, the turkey may be stored in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days before cooking.

--**In cold water**: Thaw the securely wrapped turkey, making sure the water is not able to leak through the wrapping. It’s usually best to keep the turkey wrapped in the original package, unless there is a leak. Keep the turkey submerged. Change water every 30 minutes and cook immediately after thawing. Do not refrigerate or refreeze.

Here are some thawing guidelines.

--**Size of turkey**: 4 to 12 pounds--thaw 1 to 3 days in the refrigerator or 2 to 6 hours in cold water; 12 to 16 pounds--3 to 4 days in the refrigerator or 6 to 8 hours in cold water; 16 to 20 pounds--4 to 5 days in the refrigerator or 8 to 10 hours in cold water; 20 to 24 pounds--5 to 6 days in the refrigerator or 10 to 12 hours in cold water.

--**Thawing In the microwave oven**: Check your owner’s manual for the size turkey that will fit in your microwave, the minutes per pound and the power level to use for thawing. Remove all outside wrapping and place on a microwave-safe

dish to catch any juices that may leak. Cook your turkey immediately. Do not refreeze or refrigerate a turkey after microwave thawing.

Roasting your turkey

--Set your oven temperature no lower than 325°F.

--Place your turkey or turkey breast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.

--For optimum safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. For more even cooking, it is recommended you cook your stuffing outside the turkey in a casserole. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

--If you choose to stuff your turkey, the ingredients can be prepared ahead of time; however, keep wet and dry ingredients separate. Chill all of the wet ingredients (butter/margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, etc.). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. Fill the cavities loosely. Cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

--A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F as 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 recommended that you also check the internal temperature of the turkey in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast with a food thermometer to be sure it has reached 165° F.

--For quality, let the turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to set. The turkey will carve more easily.

--Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavities.

Timetables for turkey roasting (325°F oven temperature)

Use these approximate timetables to determine how long to cook your turkey. Always use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of your turkey and stuffing.

Thawed, unstuffed cooking time:

--4 to 8 pounds (breast)--1.5 to 3.25 hours; 8 to 12 pounds--2.75 to 3 hours; 12 to 14 pounds--3 to 3.75 hours; 14 to 18 pounds--3.75 to 4.25 hours; 18 to 20 pounds--4.5 to 5 hours; 20 to 24 pounds--4.5 to 5 hours

Thawed, stuffed cooking time:

4 to 6 pounds (breast)--not usually applicable; 6 to 8 pounds (breast)--2.5 to 3.5 hours; 8 to 12 pounds--3 to 3.5 hours; 12 to 14 pounds---3.5 to 4 hours; 14 to 18 pounds--4 to 4.25 hours; 18 to 20 pounds--4.25 to 4.75 hours; 20 to 24 pounds--4.75 to 5.25 hours.

It is safe to cook a turkey from the frozen state, but the cooking time will take at least **50 percent longer** than recommended for a fully thawed turkey. To cook a frozen turkey, remove the bird's wrapping and follow the manufacturer's directions to remove a gravy packet, if present. Place the turkey on a rack in an oven pre-heated to at least 325°F. The time required for cooking will depend on the size of the bird.

“Always wash your hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and water,” Ingham says.

Ingham offers a few more optional cooking hints:

--Do not rinse turkeys, or other meat, before cooking; this only spreads germs. Use paper towels to gently remove pin feathers or blood.

---If your roasting pan does not have a lid, you may place a tent of heavy-duty aluminum foil over the turkey for the first 1 to 1.5 hours. This allows for maximum heat circulation, keeps the turkey moist and reduces oven splatter. To prevent over-browning, foil may also be placed over the turkey after it reaches the desired color.

For more information, visit

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Lets_Talk_Turkey/index.asp

For more information about food safety in English and Spanish, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday at

1-888-MPHotline

(1-888-674-6854)

You can also e-mail mpholine.fsis@usda.gov or visit “Ask Karen,” the FSIS web-based automated response system available 24/7 at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

Spanish-language resources on the following topics are also available at

http://origin-www.fsis.usda.gov/En_Espanol/Hablemos_Acerca_del_Pavo/index.asp

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