

A Procrastinator's Guide to a Safe Holiday

Wednesday morning. It's less than 24 hours before Thanksgiving and the clock is ticking. In other people's kitchens, roasting pans are cleaned and ready, turkeys are thawed, cranberries are chopped and pumpkin pies stand at attention. But, you are just starting. Can this holiday be saved?

Yes. Here are some sure-fire but safe ways to beat the clock. Follow this handy countdown and you too can be ready to host a safe and delicious dinner by 3:30 PM Thanksgiving Day.

THE COUNTDOWN

WEDNESDAY - The Day Before Thanksgiving

8:00 A.M. Planning And Shopping

Keep your menu basic - roast turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, relish plate, hot vegetable, heat-and-serve rolls and pumpkin pie. Make your grocery list while reviewing your entire menu, including recipes, to be sure nothing is forgotten.

Plan on 1¼ pounds of turkey per person. Is your roasting pan large enough? Do you have a meat thermometer? If you can find one, buy a fresh turkey to save thawing time. But, don't worry if the only turkeys left in the supermarket are frozen. We will proceed as if a frozen 20-pound bird is what you buy.

10:00 A.M. Thawing The Bird

Plan on about 30 minutes per pound to defrost your bird. Place the bird in its unopened bag in the sink and cover with cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes to ensure safe, but effective thawing.

1:00 P.M. Clean Vegetables

Clean and cut raw vegetables for relish platter. Refrigerate.

2:00 PM Prepare Stuffing Ingredients

Dry stuffing ingredients can be prepared and left, tightly covered, at room temperature. The perishables (margarine, mushrooms, oysters, sausage, cooked celery and onion, broth) should be refrigerated. Do not combine the wet and dry ingredients at this time. Immediately before the turkey goes into the oven, combine the ingredients and stuff the bird.

3:00 P.M. Prepare Pumpkin Pie

For convenience, use a frozen pie crust and canned pumpkin mix. Use only clean, uncracked eggs that have been kept under constant refrigeration. Bake the pie until the center is set or a knife comes out clean. Cool pie for 20 minutes before refrigeration.

8:00 P.M. Clean The Bird

Remove the neck and giblets from the neck and/or body cavity. Wash the inside and outside of the turkey and giblets in cold water and drain well. Refrigerate the bird on a platter so raw juices from the bird do not drop on and contaminate other foods. WASH hands, utensils, counter and sink that have come in contact with the raw turkey to prevent the spread of bacteria. Avoid temptation to roast your turkey all night at a low temperature. Cooking below 325°F. is unsafe. Low temperature cooking allows meat to remain too long at temperatures where bacteria can grow.

THURSDAY - Thanksgiving Day

9:45 A.M. Preheat Oven To 325°F.

Combine stuffing ingredients.

10:00 A.M. Stuff The Bird

Stuff loosely. Bake extra stuffing in a pan. This ensures thorough cooking.

10:15 A.M. Put Turkey In A Shallow Roasting Pan

Place turkey breast-side up. Do not add water. You may want to brush the bird with cooking oil or melted margarine. Basting is usually not necessary during roasting. Insert meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh muscle without touching the bone. Cover turkey with a loose tent of heavy-duty aluminum foil. WASH hands, utensils, counter and sink after these preparations.

Place turkey in preheated oven. These are estimated times for roasting a turkey:

UNSTUFFED: 15 to 18 minutes per pound

STUFFED: 18 to 24 minutes per pound

A 20-pound stuffed turkey will take about 4¾ hours to cook.

NOTE: Opening the door frequently just prolongs cooking times.

11:00 A.M. Prepare Side Dishes

Place canned cranberry sauce on serving platter. Arrange cleaned vegetables on relish tray. Cover and refrigerate both dishes.

2:00 P.M. Potatoes

Peel and cook potatoes.

3:00 P.M. Mash Potatoes

Cooked mashed potatoes can be kept warm by placing the covered pot on a low burner. You can add milk or water to keep them moist.

Check turkey for doneness. The meat thermometer should register 180°F. in the dark meat and the stuffing should reach 165°F. When a turkey is done, the juices run clear and the legs "wiggle" in the sockets. A turkey breast is done when the meat thermometer registers 170°F.

Remove turkey from oven. Remove stuffing from turkey immediately. Place in covered serving bowl in warm oven - at least 200°F. Let turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving.

Now's the time to call in extra helping hands. "Cooking" guests can make the gravy and prepare the pumpkin pie for serving. Someone else can serve the vegetables simmering on the stove and the rolls warming in the oven. Youngsters can put the cranberry sauce and relish tray on the table.

3:30 P.M. Dinner's On... You Beat The Clock!

Just remember: Never leave perishable foods at room temperature over 2 hours. The turkey should be carved, served and leftovers refrigerated within 2 hours of removal from the oven.

4:30 P.M. Refrigerate Leftovers

When the meal is over, remove all meat from the bones. Store leftovers in small shallow containers. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days; gravy within 1 to 2 days or freeze these foods.

MORE TIME-SAVERS

- Save 30 to 60 minutes of roasting time by using an oven cooking bag. Actual time saved depends on the size of the turkey.

- Halve your cooking time (oven space permitting) with two 10-pound unstuffed birds versus one stuffed 20-pounder. Cuts cooking time from 4½ hours to 2½ hours.

MICROWAVE TIME-SAVERS

- Thaw a smaller turkey in the oven and cook immediately.
- Give your bird room to cook - 3" clearance top, 2" to 3" on the sides.
- Use an oven cooking bag for even heating.
- Rotate the turkey during cooking.
- Use 50% power, allowing 9 minutes per pound.
- Take turkey from oven when a thermometer shows 170-175°F. in the dark meat. Check several spots. Let it stand outside oven until temperature reaches 180°F.
- Let turkey stand 20 minutes for easy carving.