



Think You Know How to Cook Thanksgiving Turkey? ... Think Again!

10 Cardinal Rules for Preparing & Cooking Turkey

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Rule #1: If you buy a Frozen Turkey, never (ever!) thaw the Bird at Room Temperature

ALWAYS thaw your Frozen Turkey under *constant* refrigeration (36°F to 38°F) and leave the Bird in its Vacuum Plastic Sack until *completely* defrosted. Allow 24-hours of thaw time for every 5-pounds of turkey weight. I prefer four days (even if that is longer than needed, it will remain perfectly safe). This year, on **Saturday evening, November 21, 2009**, move your frozen turkey to the refrigerated section.

Rule #2: Never forget to remove the Giblet Sack and Neck from the Turkey's Cavities

After properly thawing your turkey, ALWAYS remove the Giblet Sack (usually in the Neck Cavity) and the Neck (from the Main Cavity). NEVER roast the turkey with either of these components being removed. During cooking they will sour, and not only give a foul (*no pun intended*) taste to the meat, but may also increase bacteria level in the bird.

Rule #3: If you insist on stuffing your Turkey, never stuff the Bird the Night before

There are serious food safety issues with the stuffing of poultry, but if you insist, prepare your stuffing the day before needed and chill it thoroughly. Stuff your turkey with the cold stuffing moments before placing the turkey in the oven. Be reminded, stuffing your turkey DOES increase cooking time, and the stuffing absorbs vital, flavorful cooking juices from the turkey, both of which increase the potential for a "dry" roast turkey.

Rule #4: Forget Mom's (or Grandma's) "Overnight Roasted" Turkey

Low and slow cookery, while great for barbecued foods has NO application to roasting turkey. The typical overnight roasted method's UNSAFE temperatures of 200°F to 250°F create an 'ideal' breeding ground for bacteria (and more dangerous if the turkey is stuffed). The minimum roasting temperature for turkey is 350°F. If the turkey is 'stuffed', lower the oven temperature to 325°F.



Rule #5: Never use the “Brown Paper Shopping Bag” Roasting Method

Thankfully, brown paper shopping bags are becoming less available. DO NOT cook your holiday turkey in a brown paper bag unless it is the type approved for direct food contact. Chemicals and solvents used in the manufacture of shopping bags can leach into the turkey during roasting, causing the potential for health problems. Further, the bag can present a fire hazard, especially when saturated with the hot oils from cooking.

Rule #6: Never use a Microwave Oven to Cook Turkey

While convenient, and seemingly easier, microwaves cook very unevenly, including those with rotating trays. Their ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ spots can cause dangerous pockets for rapid bacterial growth, not to mention the dehydration of the turkey’s natural juices.

Rule #7: Likewise, never use a Crock Pot, not even for a Boneless Turkey Breast

Consistent with the other No-No’s, crock pots keep the cavity of the turkey at dangerously low temperatures for a very long time, again creating the ideal breeding ground for bacteria to rapidly grow and multiply.

Rule #8: Never ‘GUESS’ when your Turkey is done

‘Time and temperature’, ‘Juices running clear’ and ‘twisting the drumstick bone’ are all old fashioned value-judgment calls that generally yield overcooked turkeys. The ONLY way to be 100% sure of proper and safe doneness is to use an accurate, calibrated ‘Instant Read’ meat thermometer. Insert several inches into the thickest part of the thigh, through the skin so the thermometer’s tip ends up about an inch above the joint. The turkey is ready when the thigh temperature reading is **170°F**. (*By the way, a temperature over 180°F is going to eat ‘dry’.*)

Rule #9: Never rely on “Plastic Pop-Out Timers”

These pre-inserted “timers” are most generally inaccurate. They either “pop-out” too soon, yielding a very undercooked turkey or too late, and your turkey will be incredibly overcooked. Stick with an Instant Read Thermometer.

Rule #10: Never forget to allow your Roasted Turkey to ‘rest’ before carving

For maximum flavor and juiciness, ALWAYS allow your turkey to ‘rest’ a minimum of 20 minutes (but not more than 30 minutes) at room temperature before carving. To maintain proper serving temperature, carefully transfer the turkey onto a Serving Platter and ‘TENT’ with Aluminum Foil, which will gently maintain temperature without over cooking or excessive cooling.