

It's not surprising that more turkey is eaten during the month of November than any other month. What may be surprising is some of the lesser known facts about turkey and how to thaw it properly. Let's start with the most common types of turkeys.

Tom or Hen?

You may have heard that a tom or male turkey is tastier and tenderer than a hen or female turkey. The reality is that while a tom is larger – weighing up to 24 pounds compared to a hen weighing between 8 to 18 pounds, the taste and tenderness should be equal.

Fryer/Roaster?

These are the youngest and most tender turkeys, averaging in 5 to 9 pounds and are a good selection for small families.

Free Range?

When you see a package of turkey labeled as free range or free roaming, it means the producer has demonstrated to the USDA's food safety agency (Food Safety and Inspection

Service) that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside.

What does Young Turkey mean?

Current regulations stipulate that turkeys less than 8 months old are young.

What Are Basted and Self-Basted Turkeys?

If the turkey was injected or marinated with a solution containing butter or another edible fat, broth, stock, flavor enhancers or other approved substances, it must be labeled as basted or self-basted.

Nutritional Benefits

Turkey is low in fat and high in protein. In fact, turkey has more protein than chicken or beef. Over 70% of turkey meat is white meat, which has fewer calories and less fat than dark meat. Turkey is also a relatively inexpensive source of iron, zinc, phosphorous, potassium and B vitamins.

Thawing

The USDA recommends three ways to thaw a turkey: in the refrigerator (allow 1 day for

every 4-5 pounds of turkey), in cold water (submerge the turkey while it is still in the airtight packaging or a leak-proof bag, changing the water every 30 minutes), or in the microwave (cook the turkey immediately after thawing in the microwave to avoid holding partially cooked food).

A turkey should never be defrosted on the counter.

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If you are wondering how to use leftover turkey from your Thanksgiving meal and you love pasta, here's another way to enjoy it.? Try this main dish that includes pasta, turkey, and peas.

Pasta with Turkey and Peas

- 3 cups of macaroni
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 cup cooked turkey, chopped
- 1 (15 ounce) can low-sodium peas, drained
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

Cook macaroni according to instructions on the package. In a medium-sized skillet, cook the onion in the oil until soft. Add the turkey and peas, cook until hot; about 5 to 7 minutes. Toss the turkey and peas with the cooked macaroni and sprinkle Parmesan cheese. Other vegetables can be substituted for the peas and other pasta substituted for the macaroni. Yield: 8 servings.

Adapted from <https://whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

Nutrients Per Serving: 260 calories, 5 g total fat, 1 g saturated fat, 13 g protein, 39 g carbohydrates, 4 g dietary fiber, 4 g total sugars, and 129 mg sodium

