

Turkey Do's and Don'ts

Can you believe it's almost Thanksgiving? If you're like most of us, you're starting to think about family get-togethers and menu items for the Thanksgiving meal. Turkey is the base of many traditional holiday meals. While most families roast a turkey in the oven, you might consider some alternative methods.

It's easy to find new or alternative ways to cook turkey other than the traditional baked variety, but it's important to know which methods are safe and which are not.

Let's look at a few safe and unsafe methods.

Unsafe, alternative methods include not recommended include:

- **Brown Paper Bag Method.** This involves placing the turkey in a large brown paper grocery bag and cooking the turkey at a very low temperature. Brown paper bags are not intended for cooking. Chemicals in the bag may seep into the food, making it unsafe. Also some bags contain tiny metal shavings.
- **Slow-Cooking Overnight Method.** This involves cooking the turkey at 190 to 200 degrees F. overnight for 12 to 13 hours. A low temperature means the turkey will take longer to heat and will increase the risk of harmful bacteria growth and the chance that toxins will be produced. This can put your family and guest at risk of food poisoning due to the low cooking temperature used.
- **Trash Bag Method.** This involves placing the whole turkey in a large trash bag and marinating it in salt, herbs and spices for several hours at room temperature, which could result in bacteria buildup. Do not use nonfood grade materials to hold food because chemicals and non-food colors may leach into food
- **Turkducken.** This is a partially boned turkey layered with a boned duck, then with a boned chicken and spread with layers of stuffing between each bird. The entire collection is rolled, tied and roasted at 190 degrees F for 12 to 13 hours. This can be very unsafe if not handled properly. If you do choose to use this method, keep birds chilled until ready to assemble. Quickly preheat oven set at 325 degrees F or higher. Make sure the stuffing and bird reaches 165 degrees or higher. Check temperature at several locations

Safe, alternative methods include:

- **Oven cooking bag method.** This involves using an oven-cooking bag. Cooking turkey at temperatures 325 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. This should produce a moist-heat cooking environment for the turkey. You can use fresh or thawed turkey for this method.
- **Fried method** is usually done with smaller turkeys (8-10 pounds) and fried in peanut oil.
- **Grilled method** is also used with smaller, unstuffed turkeys, weighing 8 to 14 pounds. The oven should be set between 325 to 350 degrees Fahrenheit to grill a turkey.

Whichever method used remember these tip:

- Never thaw turkeys at room temperature. It is best to thaw in the refrigerator.
- Do not cook a turkey below 325 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Turkeys should be cooked to the minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- It is also important that you carefully read the instructions for the cooking method and that you wash your hands, utensils, and counters that may have been contacted by raw turkey.
- You do not need to wash the turkey.