

Safety Recommendations for Roasting a Turkey

Thanksgiving is almost here. For many who are planning to prepare a Thanksgiving dinner, there is often stress and questions. What kind of turkey should I buy? Should I buy a frozen turkey or fresh one? How do I store my turkey? Here are a few tips that can help calm your fears, but also ensure that your meal is safe for you and your family and friends. These recommendations come from USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service

Plan Ahead. While planning should have begun a few weeks ago, it is not too late. Make a plan and shop early in the week. Do you want a fresh or frozen turkey? Do you have space in your freezer to keep a turkey frozen.

Fresh or Frozen. You can buy a frozen turkey at any time. They are safe as they are frozen immediately after they were processed. Fresh turkey should be purchased only 1 to 2 days before cooking. It is not recommended that you purchase a pre-stuffed fresh turkey.

Size of Turkey to Purchase. If you purchase a whole turkey, plan 1 pound per person. Boneless turkey ½ pound per person.

Thawing. Do not thaw at room temperature. The safest way is to thaw in the refrigerator. Allow 24 hours per 4 to 5 pounds of turkey. For turkeys 4 to 12 pounds, 1 to 3 days; 12 to 16 pounds 3 to 4 days; 16 to 20 pounds 4 to 5 days; 20 to 24 pounds 5 to 6 days. Thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days.

You can also thaw a turkey in cold water. Submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. All 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. For turkeys 4 to 12 pounds that is about 2 to 6 hours; 12 to 16 pounds, 6 to 8 hours; 16 to 20 pounds, 8 to 10 hours; 20 to 24 pounds 10 to 12 hours.

Thawing a turkey in the microwave is safe if the turkey is not too large. Check your manufactures instructions for safely thawing. You should cook the turkey immediately after thawing.

Preparation. Make sure you have all that you need to prepare your holiday meal. Check to make sure your equipment is working properly. Make sure the roasting pan is large enough to hold your turkey. Also, you need to have a food thermometer. Wet and dry stuffing ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated safely. Mix ingredients just before placing stuffing inside the turkey if you choose to stuff it or into a casserole dish.

If you choose to stuff your turkey, stuff loosely. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria quicker in a moist environment. Place stuffed turkey in the oven immediately.

Cooking. Cook your turkey in an oven at 352 degrees F. Use a food thermometer to make sure your turkey reaches the minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees F. throughout the bird. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.

All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165 degrees F. The stuffing should reach 165 Degrees F., whether cooked inside the bird or in a separate dish.

Cooking times recommended for unstuffed turkey: 8 to 12 pounds, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 3 hours; 12 to 14 pounds, 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours; 14 to 18 pounds, 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours; 18 to 20 pounds, 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ to 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours, 20 to 24 pounds, 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 hours. Stuffed turkeys should be cooked about 15 to 30 minutes longer than the unstuffed turkeys.

When the turkey is removed from the oven, let stand 20 minutes. Remove stuffing and carve turkey.

Storing Leftovers. Cut the turkey into small pieces; refrigerate stuffing and turkey separate in shallow containers within 2 hours of cooking. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days or freeze these foods. Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165 degrees F. or until hot and steaming.