

Wise Notes for Consumers

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Let's Talk Turkey

It's almost time to give thanks and feast on turkey with family and friends. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Wise County wants to make sure that the turkey you serve produces only compliments, and not complaints, by encouraging you to follow four simple steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

If you choose to buy a frozen bird you may do so at any time, but make sure you have adequate storage space in your freezer. If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure you purchase it only 1-2 days before cooking.

Following are guidelines on the size of turkey to purchase: Whole birds- allow 1 pound per person; boneless breast of turkey- ½ pound per person; breast of turkey- ¾ pound per person.

Before you begin working with poultry, or any potentially hazardous food item, one of the primary rules of food safety is to keep everything CLEAN by washing hands with warm/hot soapy water before preparing food, and after your hands have come in contact with raw turkey.

After purchasing, take your turkey home and store it in the freezer or the refrigerator. Never store the turkey on the counter top, or any other place where the temperature reaches above 40 degrees F.

The safest place to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator. Depending upon the size of your turkey, it may take up to 2-5 days to thaw in the refrigerator. Place your turkey on a tray in the refrigerator to prevent its juices from dripping on other foods. As a rule of thumb, it takes approximately 24 hours to thaw every 5 pounds of turkey in the refrigerator.

The turkey may also be thawed in cold water. Allow approximately 30 minutes per pound. Wrap the turkey securely; making sure the water is not able to leak through the wrapping. Submerge your wrapped turkey in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook the turkey

immediately after it is thawed and do not refreeze.

If the turkey is thawed in the microwave, it should be cooked immediately because areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook. Follow the instructions on the package for thawing.

A turkey that is 8-12 pounds will take approximately 3 hours to cook. 12-14 pounds will take 3 to 3.75 hours, 14-18 pounds will take 3.75 to 4.25 hours, 18-20 pounds will take 4.25 to 4.5 hours, and 20-24 pounds will take 4.5 to 5 hours to cook.

To safely cook the thawed turkey, tuck the wing tips under the shoulders of the turkey and place in a roasting pan with ½ cup water. For safety, stuffing should be cooked separate from the turkey. A tent of foil can be loosely laid over the turkey for the first 1 to 1.5 hours and removed for browning. Place the turkey in an oven set no lower than 325 degrees F.

Turkey meat will be safely cooked when the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees F; however, the meat may still be slightly pink. Some people prefer cooking turkey to a higher temperature (whole turkey to 180°F in the innermost part of the thigh; turkey breasts to 170 degrees F in the thickest part). For quality, let the turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving.

If you are stumped on the best way to thaw, prepare or cook a turkey, concerned about food safety, you can call the **USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline** toll free at 1-888-674-6854 or send an Email to: mpholine.fsis@usda.gov web page link for Hotline. The hotline will be staffed with food safety specialists on **Thanksgiving Day from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Central Time** to answer your turkey questions.

Happy Thanksgiving Everyone!

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