

News From Your County Agent
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I don't know about you but we finally make it to Thanksgiving week and already for the past 2 weeks I have seen more Christmas commercial than I have seen in the past few years. It just seems that commercialization of our traditional holidays have been the focal point of almost all businesses and it seems to get earlier and earlier each year. Setting all these distractions aside I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone of you a very happy and joyful Thanksgiving holiday with friends and family. HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Rabbits For Clover Kids Due Next Month

Time is quickly approaching for families who plan to have their children participate in a 4-H Clover Kids program in La Pryor, Batesville or Crystal City the time is now to complete the registration of your youngsters and to make plans in locating a rabbit project for your child. The Zavala County 4-H Clover Kids Group is a group designed just for Clover Kids. This group focuses on youth in Kindergarten up to 2nd grade and prepares them for their adventures as a 4-H member in the future. The group offers a variety of cooperative hands-on experiences to assist children in becoming competent, confident, connected, contributing, and caring citizens with character. The Zavala County 4-H Clover Kids participate in the Zavala County Junior Livestock Show with companion rabbits as their main project. Deadline to get these rabbits is December 10 but parents are encouraged to get these rabbits way before this date to allow the youngsters time to get used to caring and handling a rabbit project. For more information about this program or assistance in locating a rabbit project contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

4-H Record Books Due January 11, 2018

All 4-H exhibitors must submit a completed 4-H animal project recordbook by 11 a.m. on Friday January 12, 2018. Currently you should be entering and including all expenses for your project in your book each time you have an expense or complete an activity associated with your project. There will be a 4-H recordbook help session on Saturday December 16 following the showmanship clinic and shearing demonstration at the stockshow barn in Crystal City. You are encouraged to NOT wait until the last day when your books are due to complete your entries. You will NOT be allowed to show your animals in the Zavala County Junior Livestock Show if you do not submit a completed book by the deadline. 4-H animal project books were provided to you during the validation of all animals. If you did not pick one up or you have lost your original copy or you need more information regarding 4-H animal project recordbooks contact the Zavala County Office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 830-374-2883.

Tip of The Week: Solving The Turkey Selection Maze

Used to be you would go out to the chicken and turkey pen look for the bird that gave you fits all year long, making sure it was good and fat and then give it the last right and begin processing it for the big feast. This luxury is not available to many of us so you will have to venture out and find one and navigate through the turkey buying maze. There's a lot that goes into making the turkey at the

dinner table as scrumptious as it is. And it all begins with buying the right bird. I hope to give you some tips on picking the right turkey for Thanksgiving.

1. Grades of Birds: If you are buying your bird from a retail store be sure you are buying a USDA approved grade A bird. While there are other grades, Grade A is the most common grade sold in supermarkets. What makes poultry products qualify for Grade A depends on the absence of "defects," such as the presence of feathers or bruising and discoloration. As poultry is graded, it either meets Grade A criteria for quality or it is downgraded to lesser grades (B & C) depending on the number of defects.

2. Labels: The type of bird you buy will depend on where you shop for it. Supermarkets and poultry suppliers are stocked with turkeys at this time of the year. But deciphering what each label on them means can be a task in itself. The types that you are most likely to find have been explained below.
Natural: This is probably the best kind of bird to buy if you intend to cook it within a couple of days, after chilling (not freezing). It is generally sold fresh and has no artificial ingredients in it.

Minimally Processed: This label means that the bird has been processed, but to a relatively lesser extent than its possibly-injected-with-antibiotics counterparts. These processes are mostly preservation-centric and can include drying, freezing, smoking, and sometimes even roasting and fermenting.

Organic: Buying organic turkey is encouraged for the sole reason that the turkey contains a majority, i.e., almost 95% of ingredients that are purely organic. USDA regulations dictate that they be so.

Free-range: A turkey labeled so means that while it was bred in captivity, the bird had 'sufficient access' to the outdoors. How much this 'access' is, no one can say.

Pastured: Birds that grew up in pastures are (supposed to have been) allowed to graze and remain outdoors. Since they consume only naturally occurring grass, they are considered more healthy, are generally high in nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, and have leaner meat.

Kosher: Birds that have been bred as per Jewish customs and fed grains are referred to as kosher turkeys. They are slaughtered according to Jewish traditions (may even be in the presence of a rabbi) and soaked in salt and water brine for preservation.

Heritage: Heritage turkeys are steeply priced as they are rare, indigenous birds and are scarcely available with special breeders.

Hormone-free is a misleading label that many turkeys bear. Federal regulations do not permit the use of hormones in poultry. So, make sure you ask the vendor what the label implies before you buy the bird.

3. How Much Turkey Do You Need: Assign 1 to 2 pounds of turkey to each person you expect at the table, depending on how much you know they can eat. People may tend to fast all day to enjoy dinner thoroughly, so factor in that as well. If you wish to keep leftovers aside, then assign a minimum of 2 pounds to each person. This will give you a rough idea of how much you need to buy.

4. Age of the Bird-Matters: A general rule of thumb when it comes to turkey, or any kind of meat, is that the younger the animal/bird, the more tender the meat. Hence, turkeys that are under 4 months have the most tender meat and are extremely easy to roast. As they grow older, their meat becomes firmer and more difficult to roast. The meat is easy to roast until they're around 6 to 7 months. After that, it is just reasonably tender.

5. Storage Considerations:

Frozen: Though buying frozen turkey is the least expensive and the most convenient option, the defrosting and thawing process can take quite a while. Hence, a frozen bird should be removed from the deep freezer and stored in the refrigerator a minimum of 3 days before you cook it (make sure you have enough room before you buy it). The standard calculation is one whole day for 5 pounds of bird, so do the math and move it accordingly.

Hard-chilled: If you've purchased hard-chilled turkey instead of a deep frozen one, then you should ideally cook it within one day of thawing.

Fresh: Fresh turkey should be refrigerated for no more than 2 days before it is cooked.

Remember to follow the appropriate storage, thawing, marinating, and cooking instructions as per your recipe and you'll have a lovely, succulent turkey that everyone will remember for ages! And of course follow all food safety handling and preparation practices. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving week. M.V.

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