

Let's Talk Turkey



Five Most Popular Thanksgiving Traditions

Traditions are a big part of the Thanksgiving holiday, and every American family has their own way of celebrating. From stuffing the turkey to taking in a football game, here are the five most popular.

Turkey and Trimmings

From the first Thanksgiving to today's turkey burgers, turkeys are an American tradition dating back centuries. According to the National Turkey Federation, 95 percent of Americans eat turkey at Thanksgiving. Regional twists offer variations on the traditional roasted bird, including coffee rubbed turkey from Hawaii, salt encrusted turkey from New England, and deep fried turkey from the South.

Time Out for the Pigskin

Throughout the United States, football on Thanksgiving Day

is as big a part of the celebration as turkey and pumpkin pie. Dating back to the first intercollegiate football championship held on Thanksgiving Day in 1876, traditional holiday football rivalries have become so popular that a reporter once called Thanksgiving "a holiday granted by the State and the Nation to see a game of football."

Parading Around

The first American Thanksgiving Day parade was held in 1920, organized by Gimbel's Department Store in Philadelphia, not Macy's as most people believe. The NYC Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade tradition actually began in 1924, and has grown into an annual event of balloons, bands, and floats, enjoyed by more than 46 million people each year in person and on TV.

Making A Wish

Does your family fight over the wishbone from the Thanksgiving turkey? Known as a "lucky break" the tradition of tugging on either end of a fowl's bone to win the larger piece and its accompanying "wish" dates back to the Etruscans of 322 B.C. The Romans brought the tradition with them when they conquered England and the English colonists carried the tradition on to America.

Giving Thanks

Last, but certainly not least, Thanksgiving is about giving thanks for the people and blessings of the past year. From pre-meal prayers to providing holiday meals to the homeless, the holiday is truly a celebration of thanksgiving. ■

Turkey Facts You Never Thought You'd Need To Know

- ▶ More than 45 million turkeys are cooked and eaten in the U.S. at Thanksgiving
- ▶ A turkey under 16 weeks of age is called a fryer, while a young roaster is 5-7 months old
- ▶ Turkeys have great hearing, but no external ears; they can also see in color, have excellent visual acuity, and an excellent sense of taste
- ▶ Domesticated turkeys cannot fly; wild turkeys, however, can fly for short distances; they can also reach speeds of 25 mph on the ground
- ▶ Age is a determining factor in taste; old, large males are preferable to young toms; the opposite is true for females, old hens are tougher birds
- ▶ The ballroom dance known as the Turkey Trot was named for the short, jerky steps a turkey makes

Alternate Routes to Get Your Turkey to the Table



Conventional ovens are not the only way to cook a turkey this Thanksgiving. Get creative! The following are methods suggested by the United States Department of Agriculture for cooking your bird, safely, big or small.

Electric Roaster Oven

This tabletop appliance serves as an extra oven for cooking a turkey. Generally, the cooking time and oven temperature setting are the same as a conventional oven. Preheat the oven to at least 325 degrees, place on the roaster oven rack so the turkey is raised out of the juices, and leave the lid on throughout cooking, removing it as little as possible to avoid slowing the cooking process. Use a food thermometer to be certain the temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast reaches the safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Covered Gas Grill

Gas grills have become very popular in the last few years. If your gas grill has only one large burner, place a pan of

water under the grate to create indirect heat. Place the turkey in a roasting pan and place on top of the grill.

If the grill has two or three burners, the turkey should be placed away from the flame. This can be done by turning off one of the burners and placing the turkey in that area. When using a gas grill, always follow manufacturer's directions for cooking times.

Smoking a Turkey

Smokers use either electricity, gas, or charcoal for heat. For gas or electric smokers, follow manufacturer's instructions.

Charcoal smokers have two pans—one for charcoal and one for liquid. Smokers require a liquid to create the moist, hot smoke needed for cooking. When using a charcoal smoker, fill the liquid pan with water, wine, apple juice, or the liquid you desire. Fill the charcoal pan with charcoal. When the smoker reaches an internal temperature of 225 to 300 degrees, quickly place the turkey on the smoker rack and replace the cover.

Add charcoal every 1 to 2 hours to

maintain the correct temperature and replenish the liquid as necessary. Heat and liquid are critical to maintaining the smoke that cooks the turkey.

Cooking times will vary. Estimate 20 to 30 minutes per pound.

Deep Frying a Turkey

A whole turkey can be successfully cooked by the deep frying method provided the turkey is not stuffed and has been completely thawed. The turkey should be 12 pounds or less in size.

Select a cooking vessel large enough to completely submerge the turkey in oil without it spilling over.

Select a safe location outdoors for deep frying your turkey. Heat the cooking oil to 350 degrees. Never leave the hot oil unattended during cooking and monitor the temperature with a thermometer. Allow approximately 3 to 5 minutes per pound cooking time. Remove turkey from the oil and drain oil from the cavity. Place it on a paper towel lined tray and let it rest about 20 minutes before carving.

Microwaving a Turkey

Turkeys can be successfully cooked in a microwave oven—whole or in parts. Turkey parts can be cooked in a dish with a lid or covered in plastic wrap with holes for venting. A 12 to 14 pound turkey is the maximum size most microwaves can accommodate. Microwaves sometimes cook a whole turkey unevenly, so microwaving it in an oven cooking bag aids in even heat distribution. Allow 3 inches oven clearance on top and 2 to 3 inches of space around the bird. The time for cooking a turkey in the microwave is 9 to 10 minutes per pound on medium power. ■