



Preparing Your Holiday Turkey Safely

Darlene Christensen, Extension Associate Professor

BUYING THE TURKEY

Frozen

Allow 1 lb per person. Buy anytime, but keep frozen until ready to thaw and cook.

Fresh

Allow 1 lb per person. Buy 1-2 days before cooking.

Purchasing a fresh pre-stuffed turkey is not recommended.

THAWING THE TURKEY

DO NOT THAW TURKEY ON THE COUNTER AT ROOM TEMPERATURE. Bacteria Can grow rapidly and cause food borne illness. Following are safe ways to thaw turkey.

Thawing Time in Cold Water

Fill sink with cold water. Make sure turkey is in leak-proof bag. Submerge turkey. Thaw approximately 30 minutes per pound (whole turkey). Change water every 30 minutes to maintain cold temperature. Cook immediately.

Pounds	Hours
8 - 12	4 - 6 hours
12 - 16	6 - 8 hours
16 - 20	8 - 10 hours
20 - 24	10 - 12 hours

Thawing time in the Refrigerator

Place the turkey in a container or pan. Place on bottom refrigerator shelf. This will prevent cross contamination to other food in refrigerator. Thaw approximately 24 hours per 5 pounds (whole turkey).

After thawing keep turkey refrigerated only for 1-2 days.

Pounds	Days
4 - 12	1 - 3 days
12 - 16	3 - 4 days
16—20	4 - 5 days

Thawing in the Microwave

Microwave thawing is safe if the turkey is not too large for the oven. Check the manufacturer's instructions for the size turkey that will fit into your microwave, the minutes per pound, and the power level for thawing. Cook immediately after thawing.

ROASTING THE TURKEY

For optimal food safety, stuffing a turkey is not recommended. However, if you choose to stuff your turkey, stuff loosely. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment. Place stuffed turkey in a preheated oven immediately. Cooking the stuffing in a casserole dish along side the turkey is also an option. Use the following chart for the time to cook your turkey. The times are for fresh or thawed turkey in an oven at 325°F. The times are approximate and should always be used in conjunction with a meat thermometer.

Do not depend on a pop-up thermometer alone.

Pounds	Unstuffed	Stuffed
8 - 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours	3 to 3½ hours
12 - 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours	3½ to 4 hours
14 - 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours	4 to 4¼ hours
18 - 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours	4¼ to 4¾ hours
20 - 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours	4¾ to 5¼ hours

ROASTING INSTRUCTIONS

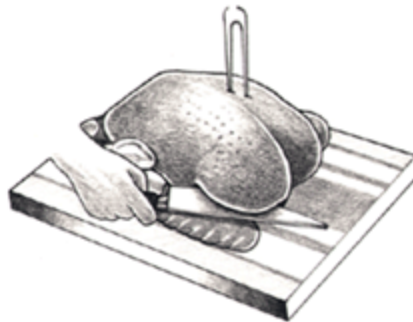
1. Set oven temperature no lower than 325°F. Cooking a turkey at very low temperatures overnight is NOT a safe practice. Follow approximate times in chart above.
2. Place turkey breast-side up on a rack in shallow roasting pan.
3. If you choose to stuff your turkey, the ingredients can be prepared ahead of time; however, keep wet and dry ingredients separate. Chill all the wet ingredients (margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, etc). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavity. Fill the cavity loosely. Cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches 165° F.
4. For safety and doneness the internal temperature must reach a minimum of 165°F in the thickest part of the thigh. **DO NOT RELY ON A POP-UP THERMOMETER ALONE.** Inexpensive meat thermometers can be purchased at grocery or discount stores.
5. Juices should be clear when thickest part of thigh is pricked with a fork.
6. Let stand 20 minutes before carving.

CARVING THE TURKEY

- 1 For easier carving and to set the juices, allow the cooked turkey to stand, loosely covered with foil to hold in the warmth, for 15-20 minutes.
- 2 Using a sharp knife, remove the leg by cutting through the joint between the thigh and body of the turkey. Separate the drumstick from the thigh.



- 3 Make a deep horizontal cut to the bone into the breast meat just above the wing.



- 4 Beginning near the front of the breast, cut thin slices down to the horizontal cut.



- 5 Repeat Steps 1-4 on the other side of the turkey.

FOOD SAFETY

It is safe to freeze leftover turkey and trimmings – even if you purchase them frozen. Wrap tightly for best quality.

Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers.

BACTERIAL GROWTH

Perishable foods, such as turkey, casseroles and cream pies should never be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Bacteria grows fastest from 40 - 140 degrees. This is known as the “Danger Zone.” Under ideal conditions, bacteria can double every 10-30 minutes. One cell can increase to over 16 million in 8 hours. See the chart to the right for an example of how quickly bacteria grow.

Time	Bacterial Growth
0:00 minutes	1
0:20 minutes	2
0:40 minutes	4
1 hour	8
1 hour 20 minutes	16
1 hour 40 minutes	32
2 hours	64
3 hours	512
4 hours	4,096
5 hours	32,768
6 hours	262,144
7 hours	2,097,152
8 hours	16,777,216

AVOID CROSS CONTAMINATION

Food can be contaminated by bacteria from foods such as raw turkey. This is dangerous especially if raw food that will not be cooked (ex: vegetables for salad) come in contact with juices from the raw turkey. To avoid such danger, using separate cutting boards for raw meat and raw vegetables is recommended.

Wash hands, utensils, sink and anything else that has been in contact with the raw turkey with soap and warm water.

You can also sanitize utensils, sink, countertops, etc., with a chlorine bleach solution of 2 Tbsp per gallon of water.

RECOMMENDED STORAGE TIMES

These short but safe limits help keep refrigerated food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. These time limits will keep frozen food at top quality.

Storage in the refrigerator 40°F or below		Storage in the freezer 0°F or below	
Cooked Turkey	3 - 4 days	Cooked Turkey	4 months
Broth and gravy	1 - 2 days	Broth and gravy	2 - 3 months
Other cooked dishes	3 - 4 days	Other cooked dishes	4 - 6 months

REFERENCES

Let's Talk Turkey - A Consumer Guide to Safely Roasting a Turkey Fact Sheet. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2006. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Lets_Talk_Turkey/index.asp

Pillsbury Kitchen Basics. "The Best Way to Carve Roast Turkey". http://www.pillsbury.com/Learn/showCategory.asp?category_nbr=9

Turkey Basics Fact Sheet. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. 2007. http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Factsheets/Turkey_Basics_Safe_Thawing/index.asp

Turkey for the Holidays - Turkey FAQs. University of Illinois Extension. www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/turkey.

In its programs and activities, including in admissions and employment, Utah State University does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination, including harassment, based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, genetic information, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, status as a protected veteran, or any other status protected by University policy, Title IX, or any other federal, state, or local law. The following individuals have been designated to handle inquiries regarding the application of Title IX and its implementing regulations and/or USU's non-discrimination policies: Executive Director of the Office of Equity, Alison Adams-Perlac, alison.adams-perlac@usu.edu, Title IX Coordinator, Hilary Renshaw, hilary.renshaw@usu.edu, Old Main Rm. 161, 435-797-1266. For further information regarding non-discrimination, please visit equity.usu.edu, or contact: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 800-421-3481, ocr@ed.gov or U.S. Department of Education, Denver Regional Office, 303-844-5695 ocr.denver@ed.gov. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Kenneth L. White, Vice President for Extension and Agriculture, Utah State University.