

## COOKING YOUR HOLIDAY TURKEY

Let's assume your turkey weighs approximately 20 - 22 pounds. The cooking temperature should be 325-degrees. The cooking time should be between 4 – 5 hours. A lot depends on how well the oven holds its heat. It's best to use of an instant read thermometer inserted in the bird's thigh, but not touching a bone, it should read between 175-180 degrees.

Instructions:

Note: on the plastic wrapping that the turkey came in there will be a cooking chart telling you how long to cook the bird based on its weight. So, when you are taking this covering off the bird you want to make sure to save this information as well as the actual weight of the bird so you know how long to cook it.

Unwrap the plastic from the bird and remove the gizzards from both the breast cavity and from the neck cavity. These can be either disposed of, I do not use them, or used in the making of gravy. Remove the legs from the plastic attachment used to keep them together during cooking. Now wash the bird, both inside and out with cold water. Note: wash just means rinse, do not use soap. Pat dry the bird, both outside and inside with paper towels. Return the legs to the plastic loop to secure for cooking.

You can rub the bird all over with either olive oil or butter. If using butter, have a stick of butter that is almost room temperature and use that to rub all over the bird, then discard the remaining butter. Now, place one or two medium to large onions – skin still on and just split in half – into the bird's breast cavity. You can also place an orange, cut in half, or some apples, cut in half, inside the cavity. You will want to add an apple or onion in the neck cavity held there by a toothpick or metal skewer. Now, some sprigs of fresh rosemary, thyme and sage can also be used in the cavity. These herbs and items lend flavor to the juice that will become part of the gravy while the bird finishes cooking.

Now place several large carrots – unpeeled, cut into chunks and several stalks of celery, with leaves which will give you lots of flavor, washed and cut into chunks around the bottom of the roasting pan. Also at least two onions, unpeeled, cut into chunks. Place the rack in the pan and place the bird on the rack.

Using fresh herbs, if you have them, if not, dried, use about 1 tablespoon fresh or 1 teaspoon dried of sage, rosemary and thyme and chop, then rub all over the birds breast, legs and sides. Then season with salt and pepper. Now pour ½ of a 32 oz. container of turkey stock into the bottom of the roasting pan and place pan in oven. Allow the turkey to cook for 30 to 40 mins, then baste, continuing to baste the bird about every 30 – 40 minutes, watching that it does not get too dark. If it starts to get too dark, cover the top of the bird with aluminum foil. Half-way through the estimated cooking time the roasting pan should be turned. Note: If it is possible to put the roasting pan in the oven with the legs facing out and the breast facing the back of the oven, then start off this way and then turn. If not, then just put it into the oven and remember we will turn the bird half-way through its cooking time. A bird this size should cook about 4 to 5 hours, depending on total weight. If you have an instant read thermometer, you want the thigh meat to register 170-175 degrees. Be sure not to hit a bone when taking the reading.

Once the turkey is cooked, remove it from the oven and carefully lift the bird out of the pan and slightly tilt it neck-side up so the juices inside the bird run out into the roasting pan. Now place the bird on a large rimmed platter. Be sure it is rimmed as the bird will continue to drain off excess liquid as it rests. Cover with foil and allow to rest at least 20 to 30 minutes. Something to remember, the breast meat will cook faster than the rest of the bird – legs and thighs, since they are the dark meat and have more fat in them they take longer to cook. If it seems like the breast is done early, meaning the pop-up has popped, you can cut the breasts off the turkey and cover them with foil, then return the rest of the turkey to the oven and continue cooking for another 25 to 30 minutes, increasing the oven temperature to 375-degrees. This will ensure that dark meat is cooked and the breast meat remains moist. Then just follow the rest of the directions re: making the gravy.

For the gravy – the simplest thing to do is to purchase two jars or cans of Turkey Gravy. Now, pour off the drippings from the roasting pan, running them through a fine mesh sieve, and then add this to the canned/jarred gravy in a saucepan and heat gently to a low simmer. You can add a tablespoon of butter at the end, off heat, to give the gravy a richer sheen and taste. For a recipe to make gravy from scratch, you can find many variations on the web.

Now pour yourself a nice glass of wine so you get a moment of rest. Then carve the bird. I usually remove the entire breast section. Once the breasts are removed, lay them on a cutting board and slice. As for the legs, remove them and set aside. Now remove the thighs and carve the dark meat. Place the sliced turkey on a platter and enjoy!

Enjoy the rest of your Holiday!

Chef Cal