

THE CONVERSATION TROY BICKHAM

Why is turkey the main dish on Thanksgiving?

Why do Americans eat turkey for Thanksgiving? (dish meal)

Environ 46 millions de dindes sont consommées à l'occasion de la fête de Thanksgiving aux États-Unis. Mais d'où vient cette tradition ? On pourrait croire que cela est dû au premier Thanksgiving partagé entre les Pères pèlerins et les nations autochtones en 1621, ou parce que la dinde existait déjà aux Amériques il y a près de 3 000 ans. Mais en réalité, cela serait plutôt lié à la façon dont les Américains ont célébré cette fête à la fin du XIX^e siècle.

Have you ever wondered why Thanksgiving revolves around turkey and not ham, chicken, venison, beef or corn? Almost 9 in 10 Americans eat turkey during this festive meal, whether it's roasted, deep-fried, grilled or cooked in any other way for the occasion.

2. You might believe it's because of what the Pilgrims, a year after they landed in what's now the state of Massachusetts, and their Indigenous Wampanoag guests ate during their first Thanksgiving feast in 1621. Or that it's because turkey is originally from the Americas. But it has more to

do with how Americans observed the holiday in the late 1800s than which poultry the Pilgrims ate while celebrating their bounty in 1621.

3. The only firsthand record of what the Pilgrims ate at the first Thanksgiving feast comes from Edward Winslow. He noted that the Wampanoag leader, Massasoit, arrived with 90 men, and the two communities feasted together for three days. Winslow wrote little about the menu, aside from mentioning five deer that the Wampanoag brought and that the meal included "fowle," which could have been any number of wild birds found in the area, including ducks, geese and turkeys.

4. Historians do know that important ingredients of today's traditional dishes were not available during that first Thanksgiving. That includes potatoes and green beans. The likely absence of wheat flour and the scarcity of sugar in New England at the time ruled out pumpkin pie and cranberry sauce. Some sort of squash, a staple of Native American diets, was almost certainly served, along with corn and shellfish.



The dinner traditionally consists of turkey, potatoes, squash, corn, green beans, cranberries and pumpkin pie. (istock)

5. Historians like me who have studied the history of food have found that most modern Thanksgiving traditions began in the mid-19th century, more than two centuries after the Pilgrims' first harvest celebration. The reinvention of the Pilgrims' celebration as a national holiday was largely the work of Sarah Hale. Born in New Hampshire in 1784, as a young widow she published poetry to earn a living. Most notably, she wrote the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

A resurrected tradition

6. In 1837, Hale became the editor of the popular magazine Godey's Lady's Book. Fiercely religious and family-focused, it crusaded for the creation of an annual national holiday of "Thanksgiving and Praise" commemorating the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving feast. Hale and her colleagues leaned on 1621 lore for historical justification. Like many of her contemporaries, she assumed the Pilgrims ate turkey at their first feast because of the abundance of edible wild turkeys in New England.



Fowl / Game

Examples of **fowl** (domesticated birds kept for food):

chicken poulet
turkey dinde
duck canard
goose oie

Examples of **game** (wild birds hunted for food):

pheasant faisan
partridge perdrix
quail caille

Game can also be wild animals hunted for food:

wild boar sanglier
venison chevreuil
fallow deer daim

to have more to do with to be linked more to / **late** at the end of / **poultry** birds eaten for their meat (for example chickens, turkeys and ducks) / **bounty** abundance of sth.

3. firsthand received directly from a source / **record** archive / **aside** apart from... / **fowle** (archaic spelling) **fowl** bird used for food / (**pl.**) **goose** (**sing.**) long-necked aquatic bird.

4. likely probable / **wheat** grain from which flour for bread is made / **scarcity** rarity / **to rule out** to exclude / **pumpkin** big round orange vegetable of the gourd family (often seen at Halloween) / **cranberry** type of small round red fruit / **squash** butternut / **staple** basic (food) / **along with** together with / **shellfish** crustacean seafood.

5. harvest collection of food from the land / **largely** mostly, mainly / **widow** woman whose husband has died / **to earn a living** to make money / **notably** interestingly / **nursery rhyme** song for small children / **lamb** young sheep.

6. editor person in charge of a publication / **fiercely** strongly, intensely / **to crusade** to campaign / **to lean on** to use (for support/information) / **lore** traditional stories / **to assume** to suppose, to presume / **edible** able to be eaten.



A ÉCOUTER SUR LE COMPLÉMENT SONORE-SEQUENCE CONVERSATION

Notre invité Dario Costa et Shelly se demandent : que s'est-il vraiment passé en 1621 ? Eux aussi retracent l'histoire pour tenter de retrouver l'origine de la tradition de la dinde de Thanksgiving.
CD audio ou téléchargement MP3 (sur abonnement)



In figures

- Around **46 million** turkeys are eaten at Thanksgiving
- Campbell's makes **50% of its total sales** of cream of mushroom soup (equivalent to French béchamel) between November and January of each year
- Around **20 million** Americans serve green bean casserole as a holiday side dish each year
- Americans consume **80 million** pounds of cranberries during Thanksgiving, including **5,062,500 gallons** of jellied cranberry
- Shoppers purchase nearly **214 million pounds of potatoes** and **50 million pounds of sweet potatoes** from American supermarkets in the weeks before Thanksgiving.

figure chiffre / **turkey** dinde / **sale vente** / **casserole** ragoût / **side dish** accompagnement / **pound livre** (453,6 grammes) / **cranberry** airelle / **gallon** 3,785 litres (US), 4,55 (GB) / **jellied** en gelée / **to purchase acheter** / **sweet potato** patate douce.

7. This campaign took decades, partly due to a lack of enthusiasm among white Southerners. Many of them considered an earlier celebration among Virginia colonists in honor of supply ships that arrived at Jamestown in 1610 to be the more important precedent. The absence of Southerners serving in Congress during the Civil War enabled President Abraham Lincoln to declare Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863.

8. Godey's, along with other media, embraced the holiday, packing their pages with recipes from New England and menus that prominently featured turkey. "We dare say most of the Thanksgiving will take the form of gastronomic pleasure," Georgia's Augusta Chronicle predicted in 1882. "Every person who can afford turkey or procure it will sacrifice the noble American fowl to-day."

9. One reason for this: A roasted turkey makes a perfect celebratory centerpiece. A second one is that turkey is also practical for serving to a large crowd. Turkeys are bigger than other birds raised or hunted for their meat, and it's cheaper

7. **decade** period of ten years / **partly** in part / **lack** absence / **among** in the group of / **supply** reserve, stock, provisions / **Congress** legislature of the federal government of the US / **Civil War** war in the US between the North and South (1861-1865) / **to enable** to permit, to make possible.

8. **along with** together with / **to embrace** to accept (enthusiastically) / **to pack** to fill / **recipe** instructions/ ingredients on how to prepare food / **prominently** visibly / **to feature** to include, to present / **we dare say** we can suppose/we are certain / **to predict** to anticipate / **to afford** to have enough money to buy.

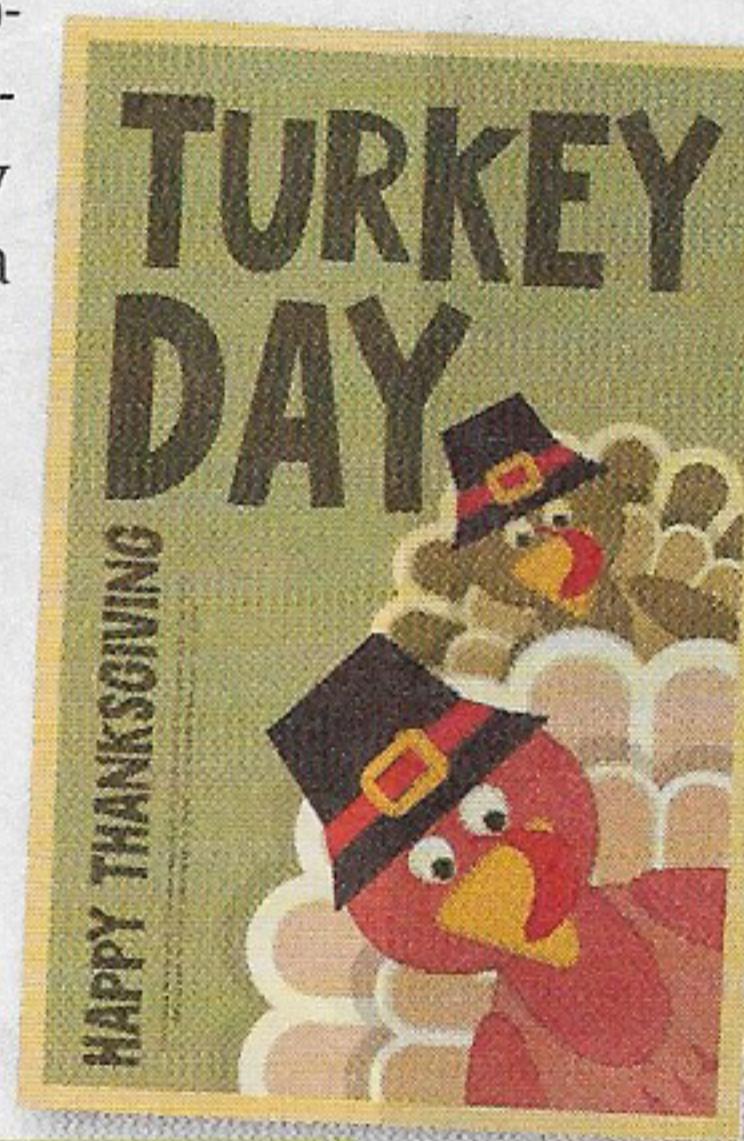
9. **centerpiece** central element / **to raise** to breed animals on a farm to eat / **to hunt** to chase an animal in the wild to kill and eat it /

to produce a turkey than a cow or pig. The bird's attributes led Europeans to incorporate turkeys into their diets following their colonization of the Americas. In England, King Henry VIII regularly enjoyed turkey on Christmas day a century before the Pilgrims' feast.

10. The bird cemented its position as the favored Christmas dish in England in the mid-19th century. One reason for this was that Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" sought redemption by replacing

the impoverished Cratchit family's meager goose with an enormous turkey. Published in 1843, Dickens' instantly best-selling depiction of the prayerful family meal would soon inspire Hale's idealized Thanksgiving.

11. Although the historical record is hazy, I do think it's possible that the Pilgrims ate turkey in 1621. It certainly was served at celebrations in New England throughout the colonial period. ●



to lead, led, led to result in / **to enjoy** to take pleasure in (here, eating).

10. **favored** preferred / **A Christmas Carol** Un Chant de Noël / **to seek, sought, sought** to look for, to try to obtain /

impoverished very poor / **meager** small and thin (here, with very little meat) / **depiction** representation, description, story / **prayerful** devout, pious, religious.

11. **although** even if / **hazy** unclear, vague / **throughout** during (all of).

Testez-vous

Avez-vous bien compris l'article ? Cochez la bonne réponse.

1. **What is known about the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving feast?**
 - a. They certainly ate turkey.
 - b. They may have eaten turkey.
 - c. They did not eat turkey.
2. **When was the traditional Thanksgiving feast that Americans know today first introduced?**
 - a. the mid-19th century
 - b. the late 19th century
 - c. the early 20th century
3. **Who declared Thanksgiving a National holiday?**
 - a. Thomas Jefferson
 - b. Abraham Lincoln
 - c. Andrew Johnson
4. **Why, according to the article, would the Pilgrims NOT have eaten cranberry sauce?**
 - a. They believed cranberries to be poisonous.
 - b. Cranberries did not grow in the area.
 - c. Sugar was scarce.

SOLUTIONS : 1. b ; 2. a ; 3. b ; 4. c