

Thanksgiving: A Practitioner's Guide

Evan Meade

October 28, 2025

Abstract

When I was in charge of the cooking for Friendsgiving back in 2023, I had compiled a bunch of notes and recipes through my planning, but they weren't very organized. In an effort to make things easier for myself and others in the future, I took some time on lazy afternoons the following summer to consolidate and clean up those notes here. Although the presentation is quite formal, my hope is that this guide isn't taken *too* seriously. Readers should feel free to swap recipes or dishes or schedules as they see fit; most of those presented here are just taken from other people anyways and could probably be improved upon (though I am quite proud of my own cranberry sauce recipe, see Sec. [3.11](#)). I'd say the most useful part of this whole guide is the oven/cooktop schedule in Sec. [2.3](#). It provides a pretty neat arrangement of items grouped by temperature and time so that you can make a full feast with only a single standard, two-rack oven. But again, even this can be totally changed depending on your menu. The other main takeaway is just how many things can be made ahead of time (see Sec. [2.2](#)). So even if you are just one person, you can make most things over the couple evenings leading up to the big day, though obviously it's even faster with help. Overall, while it definitely requires a fair amount of planning and preparation, don't stress out over a Thanksgiving feast. Ultimately, it's just an excuse to get people together, and the food is just gravy, so to speak.

Version History

Version	Date	Updater	Description
1.0	20Jul24	Evan Meade	Initial commit
2.0	24Jul24	Evan Meade	Copy over from notes
3.0	28Oct25	Evan Meade	New recipes

Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	The Menu	6
2.1	A Note on Turkey	7
2.2	Preparation Schedule	7
2.2.1	T-1m to T-1w: Pies	7
2.2.2	T-3d: Groceries	8
2.2.3	T-2d: Prep Work	9
2.2.4	T-1d: Sides and Sauces	9
2.2.5	T-0d: Turkey and Carbs	10
2.3	Oven Schedule	11
3	Recipes	13
3.1	Whole Turkey (Spatchcocked)	14
3.2	Turkey Breast (Sous Vide)	17
3.3	Short Ribs	19
3.4	Gravy	21
3.5	Mashed Potatoes	23
3.6	Stuffing	24
3.7	Green Bean Casserole	26
3.8	Roasted Sweet Potatoes	27
3.9	Roasted Brussels Sprouts	28
3.10	Salad	30
3.11	Cranberry Sauce	32
3.12	Cornbread	33
3.13	Yeast Rolls	34
3.14	All-Purpose Pie Crust	35
3.15	Pumpkin Pie	37
3.16	Pecan Pie	40
3.17	Apple Tart	43
3.18	Pretzel Salad	44

1 Introduction

Thanksgiving can be a lovely day with a lovely meal, but it can just as easily be a stressful mess. This year, almost a dozen of my friends will be descending on Dallas with a taste for turkey (or tofurkey). Yet all we have in the way of a kitchen is our Airbnb's amenities and my small apartment. As the proverbial "Chef," I am duty bound to engineer a solution to this constrictive plight. I knew if I was going to have any chance of satiating these starving souls I'd need to plan Turkey day like a heist: craft a master plan and recruit a crack team to execute it without a trace. I'll try to avoid the mandatory mid-heist betrayal because, c'mon, it's Thanksgiving gosh darn it.

I first did some [research](#) on what can be made ahead of time and what can't. Make aheads include:

- Desserts
- Stuffing
- Gravy (you'll see)
- Casseroles
- Prep work (cutting vegetables, brining turkey, etc.)

Things to make a la minute include:

- Cook the turkey
- Roast/saute vegetables
- Salad
- Starches (potatoes, breads, etc.)

This was a good sign, since I had already boldly claimed to my friends that a lot of things could be prepped ahead of time without having really thought about it at all. Probably the hardest thing about preparing a Thanksgiving meal—besides the turkey, which we will return to—is coordinating the sheer number of dishes in a typical feast without a professional kitchen. I have one oven and four burners. At most, I can have 5-6 things cooking at once, which is only about half the menu. Luckily, a lot of those dishes are relatively small

sides which can be made ahead of time, and they will often taste even better than if you made them on the day of the feast.

Time to define the menu, keeping in mind what is easiest to make ahead of time. This is designed for serving 10-12 people at Thanksgiving, which means it serves about 20 people any other day of the year. The nice thing about this menu is that it is basically scale invariant; because half the fun of Thanksgiving is leaving with a big box of leftovers, as long as you're cooking a shit ton, you're doing it right. Force people to take their goodie bag on the way out if you have to. Remember, Thanksgiving is excessive, but that doesn't have to mean it's wasteful.

Okay, enough dilly dallying, let's talk turkey.

2 The Menu

Here's what the final setting will look like:

- Turkey
- *(Optional)* Short ribs
- Gravy
- *(Optional)* Gravy (ve)
- Mashed potatoes (ve)¹
- Stuffing
- *(Optional)* Stuffing (ve)
- Green bean casserole (ve)
- Roasted sweet potatoes (v)²
- Roasted brussels sprouts (v)
- Salad (v)
- Cranberry sauce (v)
- Cornbread (ve)
- Yeast rolls (ve)
- Pumpkin pie (ve)
- Pecan pie (ve)
- Apple tart (ve) [XXX](yes, there will be three desserts, this is the American way)
- *(Optional)* Pretzel salad (ve)³

While there is not one big vegetarian/vegan equivalent to the turkey, note that most of the sides are actually vegetarian or vegan. And everyone knows

¹(ve) vegetarian

²(v) vegan

³This one's a McKenna family recipe. It sounds like a very odd combination, but it actually goes together pretty well. I think. Maybe I just have Stockholm syndrome.

that Thanksgiving is 90% about the sides anyways, so all your guests should have more than enough to eat regardless of their dietary restrictions.

2.1 A Note on Turkey

The turkey is both the most iconic Thanksgiving dish, and yet one of the least popular, in my experience. It requires the most preparation and skill, and yet can be incredibly inconsistent to make. It is the reason why there needs to be one person "in charge" of a Thanksgiving feast, as all the other dishes can theoretically be done potluck style, assuming there were no geographical constraints on where your guests are coming from.

As such, I have spent significant effort trying to find the most efficient, consistent, and tasty way to prepare it. For the first couple years, I prepared it by spatchcocking to lay it flat, allowing it to cook more quickly and evenly, while taking up less of the oven. This can work pretty well, but requires a bit of skilled prep, takes up a lot of fridge space beforehand, is a bit annoying to break down, and leaves a lot of undesirable dark meat behind.

So recently I've decided to just focus on the turkey breasts, i.e. the part people actually want to eat. And the best way I know to cook light poultry meat is using sous vide. You can just poach it slowly to exactly the right temperature and slice it up, easy peasy.

Now, if you do not have a sous vide wand and don't want to drop around \$100 on one (although it is a great investment), you can definitely use the spatchcocking method, which requires no special equipment. It is still a good recipe; I just think it is a somewhat inefficient use of time, space, and meat.

2.2 Preparation Schedule

Now for the schedule. We'll be defining T as the time everyone sits down to start eating your Thanksgiving feast. So $T-1m$ is one month before feast day, $T+30min$ is thirty minutes after you sit down, etc.

2.2.1 $T-1m$ to $T-1w$: Pies

- Pumpkin pie
- Pecan pie

- Apple pie

Pies can be made far ahead of time and actually freeze quite well, if done right. Bon Appetit gives the following [guidance](#) for pumpkin pie and pecan pie:

1. Bake it in a disposable aluminum pan (can be set in a regular pie pan)⁴
2. Let it cool completely on the counter on a wire rack (up to three hours)
3. Wrap the entire pie, including the tin, with three layers of plastic wrap minimizing any trapped air
4. Wrap that tightly with aluminum foil or a resealable freezer bag
5. Freeze completely and use within three months
6. Thaw in fridge unwrapped and uncovered for 24 hours
7. Let sit at room temperature for 1-2 hours
8. Warm in 225F oven for 30 minutes
9. Serve with whipped cream

Taste of Home recommends [different steps](#) for fruit pies, but for simplicity's sake I think we can do them the same as pumpkin and pecan.

Alternatively, the pies can be made on T-3d or T-2d and just never be frozen.⁵ Keep them wrapped loosely with aluminum foil in the refrigerator. Warm in 225F oven for 30 mins.

2.2.2 T-3d: Groceries

- Buy groceries

I like to do one big day of grocery shopping, since it usually requires at least two different stores. And if you're doing this after work, you want to be set up to focus on the actual cooking for the next couple days, so best to get this out of the way ahead of time.

⁴I actually ended up just cooking it in a non-disposable pie pan, but it was fairly thin metal so same idea. Basically just want it to freeze quickly and evenly from all sides, so I guess just don't use a thick glass/ceramic pie pan? Or do. Who knows how much this actually matters.

⁵This is what I ended up doing, and it worked out just fine.

2.2.3 T-2d: Prep Work

- Prep turkey
- Prep vegetables
- Gravy

At this point, folks are probably coming into town soon if they haven't already. "Oh no," you think to yourself. "Thanksgiving is only two days away and all I've done is make pie." But do not fret, my child. They say our memories have a recency bias where we recall the end of something with the greatest level of detail, so those desserts will already be the saving grace of your feast.

But you are right that it's time to get serious about all the other foods. This day will be all about prepping the turkey/gravy along with basic cleaning and chopping for all your other dishes. You can easily knock this out in an evening after work.

While it is fairly essential that you start the turkey and gravy today, the vegetable prep could honestly be done the next day instead. It's something that *can* be done two days before the feast if you want to spread out the prep work a bit more evenly across the schedule, but it's not essential. Just stick the chopped veggies in airtight containers in the fridge. I probably wouldn't prep vegetables much earlier than this, or they may start to dry out a bit.

Note that some vegetables—namely the potatoes and the sweet potatoes—should not be peeled or chopped ahead of time. If they are, then they have a tendency to oxidize, which makes them taste—and more importantly, look—weird. Same goes for avocados. So just chop onions, halve your brussels sprouts, slice your tomatoes, that kind of thing. Or save it for feast day if you want to have some tasks available for others to help with.

2.2.4 T-1d: Sides and Sauces

- (*Optional*) Braise short ribs
- Start thawing pies
- Whipped cream
- Salad dressing

- Green bean casserole
- Cranberry sauce
- Stuffing
- (*Optional*) Pretzel salad

People are here. There are airports to pick up from, hotels to check into, friends to catch up with. But you're cooking, so you can make someone else do the first two while you and a sous chef chat and cook in the kitchen. You'll probably want to take this day off if you can. It's not a ton of work to do, but with people coming into town you'll probably end up getting more distracted than you were yesterday, even if you have helping hands.

2.2.5 T-0d: Turkey and Carbs

- Cook turkey
- (*Optional*) Reheat short ribs
- Mashed potatoes
- Cornbread
- Yeast rolls
- Roast vegetables
- Dress salad
- Warm sides
- Warm gravy
- Warm pies

Reckoning is upon us. The final stragglers have shown up, sweaters on and belt buckles loosened in anticipation of your feast. Everyone is offering to help (hopefully), but you know it would be a disaster if everyone actually tried to help.

Here's the magic tip: never assign just one person to do something (unless they are a moderately skilled chef). Instead, assign *pairs* of people to tasks. Not because anything you're asking is incredibly hard, but because it's more

fun to work with a friend and you're less likely to make a silly mistake if you have two pairs of eyes on it. Both of these factors mean they are less likely to be talking to *you* while you are stressing out about the turkey.

Here are your teams:

- You - turkey (and/or short ribs), gravy, and mashed potatoes (these are the most difficult, yet essential tasks for the day)
- Cornbread and yeast rolls
- Roasting vegetables and warming side dishes
- Salad, serving dishes for cold sides, and table setting
- (Later) warming pies

2.3 Oven Schedule

Now we need to consider the highly limiting resource of stove/oven space. I am going to assume that like most kitchens, you have four burners and one oven with at least two racks. On Thanksgiving day, here's your burner schedule:

- T-1h - T (1 large front burner): mashed potatoes
- T-30min - T (1 front burner): gravy

And here's your oven schedule, in Tab. 1. Note that each cell means that item is in there from the time at the start of its row to the time at the start of the next row. So the sweet potatoes go in 90 minutes before dinner starts and come out 30 minutes before dinner starts, for instance. Similarly, the oven should be set to a new temperature the first time it appears, as highlighted in yellow. So, for example, two hours before dinner, it should be turned up to 450F.

While these times are fairly accurate, they should be paired with good judgment and observation. If the brussels sprouts are looking toasty after 40 minutes, pull them out early. If the turkey is a bit thicker than expected, leave it in for 2 hours. Thanksgiving dinner is rarely right on time, and your guests would much rather have a properly cooked meal a bit later than a rushed meal right on time.

Time	Upper Rack		Temp	Lower Rack	
T-3h			350F		
T-2.5h	Yeast Rolls		350F	Cornbread	
T-2h	Turkey		450F		
T-1.5h	Turkey		450F	Sweet Potatoes	Brussels Sprouts
T-1h	Turkey		450F	Sweet Potatoes	Brussels Sprouts
T-30m	Stuffing	Green Bean Casserole	350F		
T-10m	Stuffing	Green Bean Casserole	350F	Cornbread	Yeast Rolls
T			225F		
T+30m	Apple Pie		225F	Pumpkin Pie	Pecan Pie
T+1h			Off		

Table 1: Oven schedule for Thanksgiving Day

The main idea behind the oven schedule is simply to group items by approximately equal temperatures and put them in an order that leads to as many things being warm and ready at the same time as possible. It also assumes that the upper rack is exposed to a bit more directional heat from above, while the lower rack is for more ambient cooking as it is protected from the top heating element by the food in the upper rack.

Finally, temperature changes are not immediate, and can pose special risk when you are trying to drop the temperature. Both the stuffing and the green bean casserole are fairly wet and therefore unlikely to burn from a residual 450F oven. But this burning risk *is* a part of why there is a 30 minute wait between turning the oven down to 225F and putting the pies in. We don't want to rebake them, just warm them up. Also, they don't need more than 30 minutes anyways and dinner will be at least an hour, so the break lets them be warm the soonest someone could conceivably taste them.

But that all about does it as far as game day strategy goes. Now time to meet our recipes.

3 Recipes

I collected these recipes from a variety of sources: most online, some from family, a few from books, and a couple all my own. While those from other sources are mostly represented here as-is, I have added some modifications to most of them based on my own cooking experiences and some consideration of not making things more complicated than they need to be.

In particular, I try to omit any trace ingredients which are not used anywhere else. I also try and adjust cooking temperatures and times to match the oven schedule (see Tab. [1](#)), though I never dramatically alter them solely for that purpose.

3.1 Whole Turkey (Spatchcocked)

Yields approximately 10 servings

Ingredients

- 1 whole turkey
- 2 bunches assorted poultry herbs (e.g. rosemary, thyme, sage)
- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 tsp MSG
- 1/4 c bacon fat (or other roasting fat for the skin)
- Salt and pepper

Directions

Turkey Prep

1. Remove the turkey from packaging and drain in sink. Remove any neck or organs shoved in the cavity, setting aside for gravy.
2. With a pair of sturdy kitchen shears, trim along both sides of the spine, from the tail to the neck, removing it entirely from the bird. Set aside for gravy.
3. With the shears, trim the middle of the breastbone from the inside to allow the ribcage to be cracked open. Lay the bird flat on a wire rack set in a rimmed baking sheet. Tuck the wing tips under the bird.
4. Pat the turkey skin dry. Sprinkle and rub in a generous amount of salt across the skin. Rub in one bunch of the herbs too.
5. Leave to dry brine in the fridge uncovered for 48 hours.

Compound Butter

6. Mince the remaining bunch of herbs.
7. Fold the herbs into the softened butter. Add MSG and salt to taste.

8. Wrap tightly and set aside.

Roasting

9. Remove the sheet from the fridge 90 minutes before starting to cook to allow to come to room temperature.
10. Preheat oven to 450F.
11. Brush off any salt and herbs remaining on the surface of the turkey.
12. Open a gap in the membrane between the meat and the skin on each of the breasts and thighs. Force compound butter in each gap, spreading it out evenly with your fingers.
13. Rub down the entire skin with the bacon grease.
14. After the 90 minutes have elapsed, put the entire sheet with the turkey and wire rack into the oven near the middle with nothing above it. Roast until middle of breasts reach 155F, about 75 to 90 minutes. If the skin starts to get too much color, tent loosely with foil.
15. Remove from oven and let rest on the wire rack in the rimmed baking sheet for 10 minutes.
16. Break down the turkey into 2 wings, 6 breast/tenderloin portions, 2 thighs, and 2 drumsticks.
17. Serve immediately with pitcher of gravy.

Notes

This is a quick cooking, fairly consistent method which gives great skin. The biggest risk is to make sure you let it come up to room temperature before putting it in the oven; otherwise you'll overcook the outside before the inside is done.

The bacon grease I find gives great color and flavor for the skin with minimal risk of burning. But of course you could substitute this for beef tallow, or a high smoke point oil or something if you don't want pork in there.

If you forgot to soften the butter beforehand, you can chop it into 2 tbsp cubes, put it in a small bowl, and microwave for 5 seconds at a time, mashing with a fork between the intervals until just soft enough to work.

Make Ahead: The turkey must be prepped at least a day (preferably two) beforehand. The compound butter can also be premixed and refrigerated, just let it sit out when you take out the turkey to soften up. So potentially you can complete through step 8 two days beforehand.

3.2 Turkey Breast (Sous Vide)

From J. Kenji López-Alt on [Serious Eats](#)

Yields approximately 8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 large, whole, skin-on, bone-in turkey breast (about 5 lbs)
- Salt and pepper

Directions

Prep

1. Carefully remove turkey skin in a single piece and set aside.
2. Remove breast meat from breastbone. Set breastbone aside for gravy.
3. Season turkey generously with salt and pepper on all sides.
4. Place 1 breast half, cut side facing up, on a work surface. Place second breast half facedown, so the fat end aligns with the skinny end of the first breast half. Gently form into an even cylinder.
5. Tie turkey breast at 1 inch intervals using butcher's twine.
6. Transfer to vacuum bag, vacuum, and seal.

Skin

7. Preheat oven to 400F.
8. Spread skin evenly over a piece of parchment paper set in a rimmed baking sheet. Season generously with salt and pepper. Place a second sheet of parchment on top and carefully squeeze out any air bubbles using the side of your hand. Place a second rimmed baking sheet on top.
9. Roast until skin is deep brown and crisp (it will crisp further on cooling), 30 to 45 minutes.
10. Allow to cool and set aside at room temperature.

Meat

11. Heat sous vide water bath to 145F.
12. Cook for 2.5 hours.
13. Remove from water bath and unseal bag. Remove butcher's twine.
14. Cut into 1/4 to 1/2 inch slices for serving.
15. Serve immediately with broken up pieces of roasted skin and pitcher of gravy.

Notes

This yields super juicy, flavorful turkey breast with minimal effort. It's easy to prep beforehand, cook, and slice with basically no risk. It is admittedly a little odd to have the skin separate from the turkey, but this does allow for both perfectly poached meat and perfectly crisp skin: a combination which is otherwise not easily achievable when using sous vide.

Note also that the temperature and time settings for the meat are configurable based on what type of results you are looking for:

Final Result	Bath Temp	Cook Time
Very pink, soft, extra moist	132F	4 hours
Pale pink, soft, moist	138F	3 hours
White, tender, moist	145F	2.5 hours
White; traditional roast texture	152F	2 hours

Make Ahead: The turkey can be prepped ahead without cooking up to 5 days in advance. And the skin can be roasted up to 3 days in advance, stored loosely covered at room temperature. It can be re-crisped right before serving by putting back in a hot oven for a couple minutes. So overall, the recipe can be prepped through step [10](#) ahead of time.

3.3 Short Ribs

Based on Adam Ragusea's [YouTube video](#)

Yields approximately 12 small servings

Ingredients

- 1 red onion
- 3 carrots
- 2 stalks celery
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 12 beef short ribs
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 bottle (750ml) dry white wine
- 1 star anise
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- 2 tsp balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Braising

1. Roughly chop onion, carrots, and celery.
2. Heat olive oil in wide braising skillet or dutch oven until shimmering over medium heat.
3. Brown short ribs on all sides, cooking in batches if needed and transferring to a plate once complete.
4. Add roughly chopped vegetables to pan immediately, browning for a few minutes. Add in tomato paste and let cook for another minute.
5. Deglaze pan with bottle of wine, scraping any bits off the bottom and sides.

6. Add anise, coriander, a couple cranks of black pepper, and a healthy pinch of salt.
7. Add ribs back into the pan, bring to a bare simmer, and let go until exceedingly tender, about 6-8 hours, rearranging and checking periodically.
8. Remove meat carefully and set aside. Strain braising liquid and discard the solids. Add ice cubes to the liquid and throw it in the fridge alongside the meat (separate containers) to aid in the de-fatting process.
9. Let both dishes rest overnight in fridge.

Reheating

10. Remove the solidified fat from the braising liquid; save for other purposes.
11. Add remaining braising liquid to a wide pan and bring to a boil. Reduce significantly to a glaze over medium heat, about half an hour. Towards the end, stir constantly and lower heat slightly to avoid burning. It should coat the back of a spoon when fully reduced.
12. Season glaze to taste with salt, pepper, and balsamic vinegar.
13. Reduce heat to low. Toss meat gently in the glaze, and cover to reheat. Once warmed through, serve when ready.

Notes

This one is actually quite simple yet has some of the most incredible flavor of any protein dish. And it can basically be made ahead the day beforehand which is nice. The only thing to be careful of is to make sure you don't burn the glaze as you're reducing it. Also, be careful when seasoning to taste with the vinegar; a little can go a long way. Other than that, this is beefy, fatty, sugary candy which everyone will love.

Make Ahead: This recipe is actually best if braised a day or two beforehand and reheated the day of. Simply follow through step 9 ahead of time, then continue with directions on day of.

3.4 Gravy

From J. Kenji López-Alt on [Serious Eats](#)

Yields approximately 10 servings

Ingredients

Stock

- Any leftover bones or meat from turkey or short ribs
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 large yellow onion
- 1 large carrot
- 2 ribs celery
- 1 1/2 qt low-sodium chicken stock
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp soy sauce

Roux

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1/4 c all-purpose flour
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

Stock

1. Roughly break up the bones and meat, as possible.
2. Roughly chop onion, carrot, and celery.
3. Heat oil in Dutch oven over high heat until smoking.
4. Add in bones, meat, and vegetables, and stir occassionally until well browned, about 10 minutes. Be careful not to burn anything.

5. Add in stock, bay leaves, and soy sauce.
6. Bring to boil, then reduce to simmer for 1 hour.
7. Strain, reserving the liquid and discarding the solids. If needed, add more chicken stock to bring the total volume to 1 quart.

Roux

8. Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat.
9. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until golden brown, about 3 minutes.
10. Whisking constantly, add stock in a thin steady stream.
11. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook until thickened and reduced to about 3 cups.
12. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
13. Serve slightly warm.

Notes

It is definitely worth the bit of extra effort to enrich your broth like this instead of just using store bought stuff. Really makes the flavors pop, and naturally goes with the meats.

To make this vegetarian, simply exclude the bones and meat, and substitute low-sodium vegetable stock for the low-sodium chicken stock.

Make Ahead: The gravy can be fully made up to 2 or 3 days in advance and stored in the fridge. That is, it can be made fully through step [12](#). Simply reheat over low heat on the stove until warm before serving on the day of.

3.5 Mashed Potatoes

Based on Andrew Rea's (a.k.a. *Binging with Babish*) [YouTube video](#)

Yields approximately 1 quart

Ingredients

- 3 lbs Yukon Gold potatoes
- 3/4 c milk
- 3/4 c heavy cream
- 12 tbsp unsalted butter
- Salt and white pepper to taste
- (Optional) 1 bunch chives

Directions

1. Add potatoes to cold water in pot. Salt generously. Bring to boil, then cover and reduce to simmer. Cook until chunks can be pierced with paring knife with no resistance, about 10-20 minutes.
2. Drain potatoes, put through ricer back into pot.
3. Add milk, heavy cream, and butter. Fold in gently, trying not to overwork it.
4. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
5. Serve immediately.

Notes

This should be made a la minute, not prepped ahead. Since Yukon Golds are lower in starch content than Russets, it is harder to end up overworking them and making them gummy.

Make Ahead: Don't.

3.6 Stuffing

From J. Kenji López-Alt on [Serious Eats](#)

Yields approximately 12 servings

Ingredients

- 1 qt low sodium chicken stock
- 2 1/2 lbs sandwich bread (about 2 loaves; can use soft Italian or French instead)
- 8 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 lbs breakfast sausage (looking for sage flavor)
- 1 large yellow onion
- 4 large ribs celery
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 bunch fresh sage (or 2 tsp dried sage)
- 3 large eggs
- 1 bunch parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 275F.
2. Season chicken stock to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Remove crust from bread and cut into 3/4 inch dice. Spread evenly on 2 baking sheets. Bake until completely dried, approximately 50 minutes. Rotate trays and stir bread cubes periodically.
4. Remove bread from oven and allow to cool.
5. Preheat oven to 350F.
6. Finely dice onion and celery. Finely slice garlic. Finely mince sage leaves.

7. In a large Dutch oven, melt butter over medium high heat until no longer foaming, but not browned, about 2 minutes.
8. Add sausage and break up finely. Cook, stirring frequently, until little pink remains, about 8 minutes.
9. Add onion, celery, garlic, and sage. Stir frequently until softened, about 10 minutes more.
10. Remove Dutch oven from heat and add about half the chicken stock.
11. In a separate bowl, whisk remaining chicken stock, eggs, and 3 tbsp chopped parsley until homogeneous.
12. Stirring constantly, slowly pour egg mixture into sausage mixture. Gently fold in bread cubes until evenly mixed and juices absorbed into the bread.
13. Butter a 9 by 13 dish and spread out stuffing in it. Leave surface a bit rough for better browning. Cover tightly in foil.
14. Bake until center reaches 150F, about 45 minutes.
15. Remove foil and continue baking until top is browned and crisped, about 15 minutes.
16. Let cool for 5 minutes, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.

Notes

Stuffing can be a very personal recipe, and if someone has a good family recipe I'd say go for that. This is a pretty standard, sage focused one, but some people like a drier stuffing than this.

To make this vegetarian, simply substitute low sodium vegetable stock for the chicken stock, and either exclude the sausage or replace with Impossible breakfast sausage or similar.

Make Ahead: Follow through step 13 the day before the feast. Chill in refrigerator overnight. Allow to come to room temperature for 1 hr before continuing with steps and baking.

3.7 Green Bean Casserole

Yields approximately 8 servings

Ingredients

- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2 cans whole green beans, drained
- 1/2 c milk
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 1/3 c fried onions (e.g. French's French Fried Onions)

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Stir together soup, green beans, milk, Worcestershire, and 2/3 c fried onions. Pour into casserole dish.
3. Bake for 25 minutes.
4. Top with remaining 2/3 c fried onions. Bake for 3 minutes more.
5. Let cool slightly, and serve warm.

Notes

There are fancier ways to make this, but somehow this lazier version feels closer to the heart. I think this is pretty similar to how most people make it.

Make Ahead: You can follow through step [2](#) the day beforehand. Allow to come to room temp for 30-60 minutes before continuing and baking the day of.

3.8 Roasted Sweet Potatoes

From Rick Martinez at [Bon Appetit](#)

Yields approximately 10 servings

Ingredients

- 3 lbs sweet potatoes
- 1/4 c olive oil
- 2 tsp kosher salt (or 1 tsp table salt)
- 8 cranks freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450F.
2. Peel potatoes, and cut into 1 1/2" pieces. Toss everything together on rimmed baking sheet.
3. Roast, tossing occasionally, until tender and browned, approximately 35-45 minutes.
4. Serve warm.

Notes

This is a simple one.

Make Ahead: Don't.

3.9 Roasted Brussels Sprouts

Adapted from Zach Neiger's recipe

Yields approximately 10 servings

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 lbs brussels sprouts
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 4 oz goat cheese
- 1/4 c dried cranberries
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 3/4 tsp kosher salt (3/8 tsp table salt)
- 8 cranks freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 450F.
2. Halve the brussels sprouts, discarding any loose leaves.
3. Toss sprouts, oil, salt, and pepper together and spread out on a rimmed baking sheet.
4. Roast, tossing occasionally, until tender and browned, approximately 35-45 minutes.
5. Transfer to large bowl and allow to cool slightly. Dress with goat cheese crumbles, dried cranberries, and balsamic vinegar.
6. Toss lightly, seasoning to taste with salt and black pepper.

Notes

This is a great elevation of what can be a very simple recipe. So if you don't have dried cranberries or goat cheese on hand, feel free to omit that and do simple roasted veggies instead. But even in that case, please do not be shy with the oil and the roasting process. The

difference between delicious restaurant level sprouts and average home cooked sprouts is an obscene amount of oil. It's Thanksgiving; live a little.

Make Ahead: Don't.

3.10 Salad

Yields approximately 10 side portions

Ingredients

Dressing

- 1/4 c extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 2 tsp dijon mustard
- 1 tsp kosher salt (1/2 tsp table salt)
- 10 cranks freshly ground black pepper

Produce

- 20 oz salad greens
- 20 oz cherry tomatoes
- 1 red onion
- 10 oz croutons

Directions

Dressing

1. Add EVOO, balsamic vinegar, and dijon mustard to a sealable container, close, and shake to emulsify. Add dijon as needed to further emulsify.
2. Add lemon juice to taste, adding dijon as needed to further emulsify.
3. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Produce

4. Wash and dry the salad greens and add to a large bowl.
5. Wash and dry the cherry tomatoes. Slice in half lengthwise before adding to the bowl.
6. Peel and slice the onion into thin quarter rings and add to the bowl.

Assembly

7. Right before serving, drizzle dressing over top of produce bowl and toss to coat. Serve immediately.

Notes

It's a salad; don't overthink it. I only include a recipe here at all to help for grocery planning purposes. So also the proportions might be a bit off; just trust your eye for what looks like too much or too little of each topping. But basically you can do whatever you want with whatever you have on hand.

Make Ahead: The dressing can be made up to 3 days ahead of time, in which case, simply follow through step [3](#) and keep it refrigerated. Allow it to come to room temperature for at least 15 minutes before tossing just to ensure that the fats are emulsified and not solidified. Shake well beforehand too, obviously.

3.11 Cranberry Sauce

Yields approximately 2 cups

Ingredients

- 1 bag fresh cranberries (12 oz)
- 3/4 c white sugar
- 1 c water
- 1 orange (zest of)
- 1/4 c lime juice

Directions

1. Add cranberries, sugar, and water to a saucepan.
2. Simmer over medium heat stirring occasionally and lightly mashing until cranberries begin to pop, about 10-15 minutes.
3. Zest orange into saucepan and add the lime juice. Stir to incorporate.
4. Reduce heat to low and continue simmering for 10-15 minutes until it begins to gel on a chilled plate.
5. Remove from heat, let cool completely, preferably overnight in fridge.
6. Serve slightly cool.

Notes

I prefer a more sour, punchy cranberry sauce than most recipes aim for. So if you don't like that, you can leave out the lime juice and/or increase the sugar to 1 cup.

Make Ahead: The entire recipe can be made ahead of time, and in fact, arguably tastes better that way. So follow through step 5 up to 2 or 3 days ahead of time.

3.12 Cornbread

From bluegirl on [Allrecipes](#)

Yields one 9" round

Ingredients

- 1 c all-purpose flour
- 1 c yellow cornmeal
- 2/3 c granulated white sugar
- 3 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1 c milk
- 1/3 c vegetable oil
- 1 large egg

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400F.
2. Lightly grease 9" round cake pan or cast iron skillet.
3. Whisk together flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Add milk, oil, and egg. Whisk until well combined. Pour into prepared pan.
4. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center of the pan comes out clean, about 20-25 minutes.
5. Let cool slightly. Serve warm.

Notes

If you have a cast iron pan, this is a great use for it. The browning will be nice, and the presentation is way better.

Make Ahead: Don't.

3.13 Yeast Rolls

Adapted from DCASH30526 on [Allrecipes](#)

Yields 8 rolls

Ingredients

- 1 c hot water
- 3 tbsp granulated white sugar
- 2 tbsp shortening
- 1 (1/4 oz) package active dry yeast
- 2 1/4 c all-purpose flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tsp salt

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425F.
2. Mix hot water, sugar, and shortening in a large bowl. Let cool until lukewarm.
3. Stir in yeast until dissolved, then mix in flour, egg, and salt. Cover and let dough rise until doubled in size, about 30 minutes.
4. Grease a 9" round pan.
5. Divide dough into 8 equal parts. Nestle in pan. Let rise again until doubled in size, about 30 minutes.
6. Bake until golden brown on top and a knife inserted in the center comes out clean, about 10-15 minutes.

Notes

I bumped down the temperature to 400F so I could do it at the same time as the cornbread.

Make Ahead: Don't.

3.14 All-Purpose Pie Crust

From Claire Saffitz' *Dessert Person*

Yields crust for one 9" pie

Ingredients

- 200 g all-purpose flour
- 13 g white granulated sugar
- 3/4 tsp kosher salt
- 10 tbsp unsalted butter

Directions

Preparation

1. Add some ice to a cup of water, place in fridge.
2. Cut 5 tbsp of butter into 1/8" squares, place in fridge.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, and salt.
4. With remaining 5 tbsp of butter, cut into 1/2" cubes. Add to bowl, tossing to coat, then pressing between your fingers until there are no chunks of butter larger than a pea.
5. Add in the 5 tbsp of butter from the fridge, pressing between your fingers again until there are no chunks of butter larger than a pea and the mixture resembles a lightly damp sand.
6. Slowly stream in 5 tbsp of the chilled water while whisking with a fork, avoiding pouring in any ice.
7. Knead dough in bowl with your hands a few times until it comes together in a dough.
8. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap, forcing out any air and pressing down into a 3/4" thick rectangle. Chill in fridge at least 2 hours.
9. Take dough out of fridge and let rest on counter for 5 mins. Unwrap, and thwack it repeatedly with a rolling pin to make it more pliable.

Thwack and roll it out until it is a rectangle approximately three times as long as it is wide. Fold like a trifold.

10. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap again, and return to fridge. Let rest at least 30 mins, or up to 3 days before use.

Forming

11. Take the dough out of the fridge and let rest on counter for 5 mins.
12. Unwrap dough and thwack repeatedly with a rolling pin to make it more pliable. Roll it out into a circle about 13" in diameter.
13. Drape dough over pie pan. Lift and place dough into the bottom corners; do not press it down into there, or you will risk breaking the dough.
14. Trim any excess dough which is hanging far off the edge of the pan. Tuck the edge of the dough under itself so that it is between the lip of the pan and the crust. Form this circular wall all the way around the rim.
15. Pinch one finger between two others to make a wavy edge of the rim. Follow back pressing your thumb into each part of the wavy rim which sticks out, making sure that the dough is adhering to that rim.

Notes

You can scale this recipe up to double or triple, just divide the dough by mass. This is a nice, all-purpose, simple pie crust which you can use whether you are par-baking or not.

Make Ahead: This can be made well ahead through step 10. If going to use it within 3 days, leave wrapped in fridge. If going to use within a month, wrap in 2 layers of foil and freeze, defrosting in fridge a day before use.

3.15 Pumpkin Pie

From Claire Saffitz' *Dessert Person*, and her [YouTube video](#)

Yields one 9" pie

Ingredients

Crust

- 1 All-Purpose Pie Crust (see Sec. [3.14](#))

Filling

- 5 tbsp unsalted butter (2.5 oz / 71g)
- 1/3 c honey (4 oz / 113g)
- 3/4 c heavy cream (6 oz / 170g), at room temperature
- 4 large eggs (7 oz / 200g), at room temperature
- 1/4 c packed dark brown sugar (1.8 oz / 50g)
- 1 (15oz / 425g) can unsweetened pumpkin puree (not pumpkin pie filling), preferably Libby's
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp Diamond Crystal kosher salt (0.11 oz / 3g)
- 1/2 tsp ground allspice
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg (preferably freshly grated), plus more for serving
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- (Optional) whipped cream or vanilla ice cream (to garnish)

Directions**Crust**

1. Preheat oven to 425F.
2. Form the crust, as described in the crust recipe. Let chill in fridge uncovered for 30 minutes.
3. Line dough with aluminum foil, such that it hangs over the rim. Fill with uncooked rice, or other pie weights. Place on rimmed baking sheet.
4. Put in oven and bake until crust is dry around the edges and just beginning to brown, about 20-30 minutes.
5. Remove foil and weights. Poke a few small holes in bottom of crust with a knife or fork to allow any trapped steam to escape.
6. Reduce oven to 325F.
7. Return crust to oven and bake until crust is set and beginning to brown in the center, about 20-25 minutes.
8. Remove to wire rack and let cool.

Filling

9. Preheat oven to 325F.
10. Put butter in small saucepan over medium low heat. Brown it, stirring constantly until sputtering subsides and butter is foaming, about 5-7 minutes. Remove from heat.
11. Add honey to the saucepan with the butter immediately to avoid burning. Stir to combine.
12. Return saucepan to medium heat for about 2 minutes, until honey is fragrant and nutty. Remove from heat and slowly stir in the heavy cream.
13. In a large bowl, whisk eggs. Add brown sugar and whisk vigorously for about 1 minute. Whisk in pumpkin, cinnamon, ginger, vanilla, salt, allspice, nutmeg, and cloves until smooth.

14. Slowly stream in the warm honey mixture, whisking constantly, until filling is homogenous.

Assembly

15. Preheat oven to 325F.
16. Pour filling into cooled crust.
17. Bake until edges are set and slightly puffed, but center is recessed and wobbles like Jell-O, about 45-60 minutes.
18. Turn off oven and prop door open, cracked. Let pie cool completely in oven. (If you are under time constraint, you can just remove the pie and cool on a wire rack for at least 3 hours, but the surface may crack)
19. Serve warm or at room temperature. Optionally, garnish with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Notes

This filling attempts to add a bit more depth to the pumpkin flavor by layering it with browned butter and honey. Use a local honey if possible for bolder flavor and regional botanicals.

Make Ahead: The pie can be baked up to 2 or 3 days ahead of time, so through step 18. When serving, can optionally warm it in a low or cooling oven.

3.16 Pecan Pie

Filling adapted from Ben Wise's family recipes

Yields one 9" pie

Ingredients

Crust

- 1 All-Purpose Pie Crust (see Sec. [3.14](#))

Filling

- 1 3/4 c pecan halves
- 4 tbsp butter
- 1 c white granulated sugar
- 1/2 c light corn syrup
- 3 eggs
- 3 tbsp flour
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- (Optional) whipped cream or vanilla ice cream (to garnish)

Directions

Crust

1. Preheat oven to 425F.
2. Form the crust, as described in the crust recipe. Let chill in fridge uncovered for 30 minutes.
3. Line dough with aluminum foil, such that it hangs over the rim. Fill with uncooked rice, or other pie weights. Place on rimmed baking sheet.
4. Put in oven and bake until crust is dry around the edges and just beginning to brown, about 20-30 minutes.

5. Remove foil and weights. Poke a few small holes in bottom of crust with a knife or fork to allow any trapped steam to escape.
6. Reduce oven to 325F.
7. Return crust to oven and bake until crust is set and beginning to brown in the center, about 20-25 minutes.
8. Remove to wire rack and let cool.

Filling

9. Preheat oven to 350F.
10. Toast pecans on rimmed baking sheet until browned and fragrant, about 8-10 minutes. Let cool.
11. Melt butter over low heat. Add to mixing bowl.
12. Mix in sugar and corn syrup.
13. Add eggs, flour, and vanilla extract.
14. Fold in pecans.

Assembly

15. Preheat oven to 350F.
16. Pour filling into cooled crust.
17. Bake until filling is set, but not stiff or dry, about 35-40 minutes.
18. Transfer to wire rack and let cool at least 3 hours before serving.
19. Serve warm or at room temperature. Optionally, garnish with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Notes

This is a delicious, authentic Southern pecan (pronounced pee-CAN) pie recipe. Trust its Georgian source.

Make Ahead: The pie can be baked up to 2 or 3 days ahead of time, so through step 18. When serving, can optionally warm it in a low or cooling oven.

3.17 Apple Tart

Adapted from Genna Campain's recipe

[XXX]

3.18 Pretzel Salad

Yields approximately 10 servings

Ingredients

- 3 c crushed pretzel sticks
- 1 + 1/4 c white granulated sugar
- 2 sticks melted margarine
- 1 (8 oz) package softened cream cheese
- 1 1/2 c Cool Whip
- 2 (3 oz) packages strawberry Jell-O
- 2 c hot pineapple juice
- 2 (10 oz) packages frozen sliced strawberries

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. Mix pretzels, 1/4 c sugar, and margarine together. Put in a flat layer in 9x13 pan. Bake 10 minutes. Let cool.
3. Mix together cream cheese and sugar. Fold in Cool Whip. Spread onto a layer on top of pretzel layer.
4. Dissolve Jell-O into hot juice, add frozen strawberries. Let partially jell. Spread over top of cream cheese mixture.
5. Chill overnight.
6. Serve cold.

Notes

This isn't the most traditional Thanksgiving dish, but it's a staple for my family. It's the epitome of a seventies recipe: an unconventional use of Jell-O, puzzling layers, and a shockingly liberal usage of the term "salad." But it hits. It hits.

Make Ahead: The salad can be constructed up to a day ahead and chilled in the refrigerator, so through step [5](#).