Your step-by-step guide to planning Thanksgiving dinner

**Two Weeks Before Thanksgiving:**

* Make your guest list and invite friends and family you haven't yet contacted. Be sure to ask if anyone has any dietary restrictions.
* Decide your Thanksgiving menu—consider the number of people you will be entertaining.
* If you're throwing a potluck-style meal, ask guests if they would like to contribute a special dish.
* If you are planning to cook a turkey, decide whether you're going with a fresh, frozen or smoked bird. When selecting a turkey, plan on 1 to 1 1/2 pounds per person, which will also leave you with some leftovers. And be certain the bird will fit in your freezer, fridge and oven!
* Stock up on staples (butter, sugar, flour, eggs) when grocery shopping.
* Make or purchase bread and rolls and freeze them for later.
* Purchase disposable supplies, if using, such as paper plates, napkins, cups.

**One Week Before Thanksgiving:**

* If you're buying a frozen turkey, purchase it now.
* Decide on a centerpiece and any other tabletop decorations.
* Prepare your cranberry relish and store it in the fridge.
* Select wine to go with your meal.
* Ask your kids to help organize games for the younger guests

**Thanksgiving Week: Monday**

* Clean out the refrigerator and freezer.
* Go shopping for perishable items on your shopping list.
* Place your turkey in the fridge to begin defrosting. Take a few minutes to learn more about food safety at the holidays.

**Thanksgiving Week: Tuesday**

* Iron linens, if necessary.
* Polish silverware, if necessary.
* Print out recipes and make sure you have all the ingredients needed.

**Thanksgiving Week: Wednesday**

* Cut up bread for stuffing. Season as desired and place on cookie sheet(s) in a preheated (then turned off) oven overnight to dry. Store in plastic zip-top bags.
* Chop vegetables, fruits and herbs for stuffing, and seal in plastic zip-top bags.
* Prepare pies. Cover and refrigerate.
* Prepare any make-ahead side dishes (roasted vegetables, casseroles). Cover and store in the fridge.
* Set up an extra table and chairs if more dining space is needed.
* Chill drinks. If you're short on refrigerator space, store them in a cold garage or out on the porch—or place drinks in a large basin filled with ice and water.

**Thanksgiving Morning:**

* Prepare the stuffing. Cover and refrigerate.
* Wrap your roasting pan with foil or use a disposable roasting pan or cooking bag for a quick cleanup.
* Clean the turkey, removing the bag of giblets. Place the turkey in the prepared roasting pan and put it back in the fridge.
* Simmer the giblets, adding water as needed until tender. Then refrigerate, covered with liquid, until needed for the gravy.
* Use your slow cooker if extra space is needed to keep menu items warm.
* Children can help set the table and create placecards for each setting.
* Prep any pre-dinner appetizers.
* Clean as you go to avoid big cleanups later.

**Four Hours Before Dinner:**

* Stuff the turkey.
* Put the turkey in the oven. The roasting time will depend on size of the bird.

**Three Hours Before Dinner:**

* Clean green beans, cover and set aside.
* Cook sweet potatoes.

**Two Hours Before Dinner:**

* Peel potatoes, then cube them and cover with salt water—simmer until tender.
* Finish preparing any additional vegetables.

**One Hour Before Dinner:**

* Fill a small pitcher with half-and-half or milk for coffee—cover and refrigerate. Fill sugar bowl.
* Set out appetizers along with napkins and small plates, if using.

**One Half-Hour Before Dinner:**

* Remove the turkey from the oven. Let it sit 20 minutes before carving.
* Reheat bread, vegetables and other side dishes, if necessary.
* Make gravy, using the drippings from turkey and the giblets.
* Mash the potatoes.
* Place vegetables, cranberry sauce and other side dishes in serving bowls.

**Serve Dinner!**

* Whisk the gravy and pour it into a gravy boat.
* Open wine and pour into decanters or glasses.
* Set out a pitcher of water so people can help themselves.
* Make sure there are salt and pepper shakers on the table.

**After Dinner:**

* Put coffee on to brew and boil hot water for tea.
* Set out the milk or cream and sugar, as well as tea bags.
* Serve dessert, coffee and after-dinner drinks.
* If the weather permits, take a walk to enjoy each other's company and digest.