

Title:

How to cook a turkey

Word Count:

905

Summary:

Some people believe they don't like turkey because they're thinking of an overcooked bird. Cooking a turkey without drying out the white meat is a lot simpler than it seems.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

The most important thing to keep in mind is that a turkey takes a long while to cook through to the bone...and keeps on cooking once you remove it from the oven. Make sure to bake, braise or roast the bird at a high enough temperature to keep it safe to eat and don't overcook it. Don't leave your turkey in the oven to keep it warm while you get the rest of the dinner ready to serve. Take it out as soon as it's done, let it cool outside the oven for about 20 minutes and then carve away. You'll see the difference immediately when a turkey is prepared properly: the dark meat soft enough to break apart with a fork - the white meat moist and tasty. The secret is all in knowing how to buy and cook a delicious turkey! We're here to help you learn how to cook a turkey.

How big a turkey should you buy? You'll need at least 1 to 1½ pounds of turkey per person if you're buying the whole bird, fresh or frozen. Of course, it's always best to go bigger. (After all, there are at least 50 ways to serve your turkey leftovers, including a winter store of turkey soup.) How long to cook? Preheat the oven to 325°F (160°C) then place the bird in the oven to roast.

A thought to consider--Great chefs suggest trying out your skills with a smaller bird before attempting to produce a holiday masterpiece. Like any other skill, perfecting a turkey recipe takes practice. Very few cooks can claim that their first turkey was perfect...but with every attempt you get more comfortable with what you're doing and the results keep getting better.

Simple steps how to cook a turkey:

Allow about 15 minutes of cooking time per pound - about 45 minutes per kilo

unstuffed. It will take a bit longer, about 20 minutes per pound or an hour per kilo, if the bird is cooked with stuffing.

1. Preheat oven to 325. Remove the wrapper to see how much the turkey weighs and determine approximate cooking time. Remove the giblet bag and the neck from the turkey cavity. Wash the turkey inside and out and pat skin dry with paper towels.

2. Place turkey breast side up on a rack in a shallow (about 2 inches deep) roasting pan. Insert meat thermometer in thigh. Add 1/2 cup water to the bottom of pan, if desired.

3. Cover turkey loosely with a tent of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Roast the turkey until temperature in the thickest part of the thigh reaches 180°F. Cooking time will vary. For example, a 20 pound turkey will take 4 1/4 to 5 hours to cook, check the temperature on the thermometer after 4 1/4 hours.

4. Meanwhile, mix the stuffing or dressing. Place in a casserole and pop it into the oven during the last hour or so of roasting time.

5. Remove the foil tent after 1 to 1 1/2 hours of cooking time to brown the skin. Brush with vegetable oil to enhance browning, if desired.

6. A whole turkey is done when the temperature reaches 180°F. The thigh juices should run clear (not pink) when pierced with a fork and the leg joint should move freely.

7. Allow the turkey to set 20 to 30 minutes before carving to allow juices to saturate the meat evenly.

Note: Cooking times do vary. Why? There are many reasons - oven temperature may not be completely accurate, the turkey may be very cold or partially frozen, and/or the roasting pan may be too small which inhibits the flow of heat. The USDA highly recommends use of a meat thermometer to determine doneness of turkey. This is an important tool in learning how to cook a turkey.

#### Stuffed Turkey:

For uniform cooking results, the USDA recommends cooking the stuffing outside of the bird (see step 4 above) If you insist on stuffing the turkey, stuff loosely and follow the steps below.

1. See step one above

2. Mix stuffing and lightly fill cavity. Allow 1/2 to 3/4 cup stuffing per pound

of turkey. It is safer to understuff than to overstuff the turkey. Stuffing expands during cooking. Refrigerate any leftover stuffing and bake in greased casserole during the last hour of turkey roasting time.

3. Place turkey breast side up on a rack in a shallow (about 2 inches deep) roasting pan. Insert meat thermometer in thigh (see Turkey Safety: Using a Thermometer). Add up to 1/2 cup water to the bottom of the pan, if desired.

4. Cover turkey loosely with a tent of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Cooking time takes longer for a stuffed turkey. For example, a 20 pound stuffed turkey will take 4 1/4 to 5 1/2 hours to cook.

5. Remove the foil cover after about 1 to 1 1/2 hours of cooking to brown the skin. Brush with vegetable oil to enhance browning, if desired.

6. A whole turkey is done when the temperature in the thickest part of the inner thigh reaches 180°F and the stuffing is 165°F. The juices should run clear (not pink) when a long-tined fork is used to pierce the thickest part of the thigh.

7. Check the internal temperature of the stuffing. Insert the thermometer through the cavity into the thickest part of the stuffing and leave it for 5 minutes. Or use an instant red thermometer which will register the temperature after 15 seconds. The stuffing temperature will rise a few degrees after the turkey is removed from the oven. If the center of the stuffing has not reached 165°F after stand time, return the turkey to the oven and continue cooking.