

There's No Need for Turkey Anxiety!

By Pati Kenney, UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

It's that time of year again when the anxiety level begins to rise, and what causes this trauma? Too often, it's the turkey!

Underdone birds, overdone birds imploding, and other sad moments will be a thing of the past if we just take the time to plan. So, plan as much of your menu several weeks before the holiday, if possible.

First question to ask: Are we going to do a turkey?

If the answer is yes, then decide if you are going with FRESH or FROZEN. There is no appreciable difference between the birds, it is just personal preference.

If you choose frozen you can purchase it anytime just make sure you have adequate storage space in your freezer to keep it frozen until it's time to thaw it.

If you choose a fresh bird then plan to purchase it only 1-2 days before cooking.

We do not recommend that you purchase a pre-stuffed fresh turkey!

The next decision is regarding what size turkey we need to purchase.

If going with a whole bird then plan 1 pound of turkey per person. If going with a boneless breast of turkey then only ½ pound per person is needed.

Build a plan for a successful turkey dinner

Ok, let's say you have chosen to go with a frozen turkey, and you run to the market and get it early. It's now safely in your freezer. The next step is to make plans to thaw the bird in time to get it into the oven on feast day.

This information is all gleaned from the USDA's

Thawing in the refrigerator:

Place the frozen bird in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40°F)

Place it on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak.

Allow approximately 24 hours thawing time per 5 pounds of turkey

Here's where your calculator comes in handy or you can use this generalized chart:

Size of Turkey Thawing Time in the Refrigerator:

4 to 12 lbs: 1 to 3 days

12 to 16 lbs: 3 to 4 days

16 to 20 lbs: 4 to 5 days

20 to 24 lbs: 5 to 6 days

Note: if necessary a turkey defrosted in the refrigerator can be refrozen

If you forget to thaw the turkey or don't have room in the refrigerator for thawing, don't fret.

Wrap your turkey well; making sure water is not able to leak through the wrapping.

Submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes.

Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey.

Size of Turkey Thawing Time in Water:

- 4 to 12 lbs: 2 to 6 hours
- 12 to 16 Lbs: 6 to 8 hours
- 16 to 20 lbs: 8 to 10 hours
- 20 to 24 lbs: 10 to 12 hours

Note: *a turkey defrosted in water cannot be safely refrozen.*

COOK THE TURKEY IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT IS THAWED!

So, let's continue with our planning:

The day before Thanksgiving, make sure you have all the ingredients you need to prepare your holiday meal. No last-minute run to the market or sending your husband to find a special spice because that is going to raise the stress level again.

Make sure you have all the equipment you will need: including a roasting pan large enough to hold your turkey and a **meat thermometer**.

Wet and dry stuffing ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and stored **separately** in the refrigerator.

NOTE: REMOVE THE GIBLET PACKAGE BEFORE STUFFING!

Mix the stuffing ingredients just before placing inside the turkey or into a casserole.

Note: the stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment.

Place stuffed turkey into oven immediately upon stuffing.

The USDA does not recommend cooking turkey in an oven set lower than 325°F.

The following cooking times are for a fresh or thawed turkey in an oven at 325°F.

Unstuffed	
8 to 12 pounds	2 3/4 to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 3/4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 1/2 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 1/2 to 5 hours

Stuffed

8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3 1/2 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 1/2 to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 3/4 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 3/4 to 5 1/4 hours

Question is it safe to roast a frozen turkey?

Yes, however the cooking time will take at least 50 percent longer than recommended for a fully thawed turkey.

When the temperature of the bird (as measured in the thigh) has reached 180°F, there is usually no other part of the bird lower than the safe temperature of 165°F. To be sure check the temperature at several locations, being sure to include the wing joint.

All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as parts reach at least 165°F.

The stuffing should also reach a temperature of 165°F whether cooked inside the bird or in a separate dish.

Remove the turkey from the oven and let it stand for 20 minutes to allow the juices to settle. Remove the stuffing and carve the turkey.

Leftovers:

Discard any turkey, stuffing and gravy left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures about 90°F.

Cut the turkey into small pieces; refrigerate stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers within 2 hours of cooking.

Use leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days; gravy within 1-2 days; or freeze these foods. Always reheat turkey, stuffing and gravy to a temperature of 165°F or until hot and steaming.

For additional food safety information:

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/lets_talk_turkey/index.asp

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your preserving questions. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfpc@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program, events and recipes, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfpc>. Sign up to receive our eNewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpcsenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!