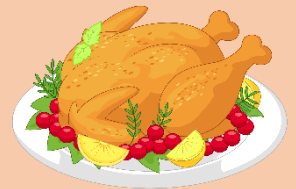


Turkey Dinner

Cooking Safe and Healthy Meals



To those of us getting ready to celebrate Thanksgiving or other festive late autumn and winter holidays, turkey is often a staple at many tables. However, preparing a large meal like this is not without its dangers. Improperly cooked or stored food can lead to foodborne illness, from the minor to the serious. However, the good news is that there are easy-to-implement tips and tricks that you can use to make food for friends and family, and cut down on the risk of getting sick at the same time! This month, we'll be talking about how to prepare, store, and serve a turkey safely. We'll also be providing some resources that can help you prepare and store other foods safely this holiday season. Read on, and happy feasting!

Thawing

The first step before cooking your turkey, assuming you bought the turkey frozen, is to make sure it's properly thawed. Food kept frozen in a freezer (and specifically in a freezer, or an environment where you can monitor the temperature and keep it close to 0 degrees Fahrenheit) can last indefinitely, but for best quality should be used within 1 year of freezing. There are 3 main ways to defrost a turkey.

1. *In a Refrigerator* – Once you remove your turkey from the freezer, you can keep it in a refrigerator set to 40 degrees to thaw. Depending on the size of the turkey, this can take anywhere from 1 to 6 days. Make sure your turkey is kept in a container so the juices don't drip on other food
 - a. Turkey that's thawed in a refrigerator can be safely refrozen, though this may impact its quality
 - b. Remember that once thawed, turkey should not be stored in a fridge for longer than 1 or 2 days
2. *Under cold running water* – After wrapping the turkey in a leak-proof plastic bag (both to avoid contaminating other foods or utensils with its juices, and to avoid water getting into the turkey), store it in cold water. Depending on the size of the turkey, this process can take anywhere between 1 to 12 hours. Make sure to change out the cold water every 30 minutes!
 - a. Remember that a turkey thawed under cold water should be cooked immediately
3. *In the Microwave* – Check to make sure your microwave can properly fit and reheat your turkey. Follow manufacturer's instructions for what time and heat to set your microwave to for defrosting the turkey. Be ready to cook the turkey immediately after you finish thawing.



Cooking

Before cooking, make sure to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Make sure that when handling raw turkey, you avoid contaminating other utensils and surfaces. Always cut raw turkey on a separate cutting board and with separate utensils, and always wash your hands after handling raw turkey and before handling other foods. Use hot soapy water to wash off utensils and surfaces that held raw turkey and before using those surfaces/utensils for other foods.

Pre-heat your oven to at least 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Place the turkey in a roasting pan that is at least 2 or 2.5 inches deep. It's recommended that you do not place stuffing inside your turkey before cooking it. In fact, it's safest to cook the stuffing separately inside a casserole dish. Use a food thermometer to make sure your stuffing has reached at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit before serving.



Cooking time will vary on the size of turkey and whether you have chosen to cook it with or without stuffing. Follow some of the links below for more specific information.

When cooking your turkey, make sure to test it to make sure it reached the proper temperature. Poultry (such as turkey or chicken) needs to be cooked to a minimum of 165 degrees Fahrenheit to kill off harmful bacteria. Using a food thermometer, check to make sure the turkey has been fully cooked through to at least this temperature. The best places to insert the food thermometer include the center of the

stuffing (if applicable), the thickest part of the breast, thigh, and wing. Make sure to test multiple spots to make sure it has been evenly cooked! If you chose to cook the turkey with stuffing, allow the turkey to sit for at least 20 more minutes before removing the stuffing and carving the turkey.

Leftovers

Once dinner has wrapped up and everyone has had their fill, the question of what to do with leftovers remains. Many folks will want to save their leftovers for future meals, and that's a good idea. However, food left out at room temperature for too long might have been exposed to harmful bacteria that you won't be able to remove just by putting it in the fridge!

So, how do you tell if it's safe to keep your leftovers? If your food (especially foods like turkey, stuffing, gravy, etc.) have been sitting at room temperature for longer than two hours (or 1 hour at temperature of 90 degrees Fahrenheit or more), it's safer to throw them out. But if not, make sure to store them in a refrigerator set to a temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit or colder. For larger foods, it's better to cut or divide them up into smaller pieces/containers to ensure they cool quickly.

Leftovers kept in the fridge can last for 3 to 4 days. If you choose to freeze your leftovers in the freezer, they can last much longer, but for best quality should be eaten within 4 to 6 months.

Remember: if reheating leftovers, make sure you heat them to a minimum of 165 degrees Fahrenheit!



Happy cooking!

References

General Guidelines: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/holiday-turkey.html>

Handling Leftovers: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/leftovers-and-food-safety>

Cooking Turkey (Basics): <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-basics-safe-cooking>

Cooking Turkey (Times): <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-farm-table#20>

Alternate Means for Cooking Turkey: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-alternate-routes-table#8>

Cooking Times: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-farm-table#20>

Food Safety for Stuffing: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-basics-stuffing>

Food Safe Temperatures: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-internal-temperatures>

Thermometer Basics: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/kitchen-thermometers>

Thawing: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/turkey-basics-safe-thawing>