

How to Serve the Perfect Turkey



Bird Size

Match the size of your Thanksgiving turkey to the size of your crowd. Smaller birds fit in the refrigerator better and are easier to handle. If you're hosting a big crowd and have two ovens, consider roasting two smaller birds instead of a large one (this also gives you a good excuse to try two kinds of stuffing). Some cooks look forward to turkey leftovers as weekend fare; others prefer to serve just enough to feed the guests at the feast.



Turkey Math

For birds under 16 pounds, figure at least 1 pound of turkey per person. For birds 16 pounds and heavier, figure a bit less since there's more meat in proportion to bone. If you want substantial seconds and leftovers, allow another 1/2 pound per person.

Prepare

About an hour before roasting, take the turkey out of the fridge. Remove any packaging and the bag of giblets (check in the body cavity and in the neck cavity). Set the turkey breast-side up on the roasting rack and let it sit. This takes the chill off the meat, which helps the meat cook faster and more evenly, and it dries out the skin, which promotes browning and crisping. Optional Extras - Rub minced herbs or ground spices into (or beneath) the skin for more flavor, place a few halved lemons or garlic cloves inside the cavity of the turkey.

Roast

Set the oven temperature to 400 degrees. The turkey will spend the first 20 minutes at 400 degrees uncovered. After the first 20 minutes, tent the turkey with foil, drop the temperature to 350 degrees and cook for 20 minutes per pound. Start checking the temperature of your turkey about half-way through the scheduled cooking time to gauge how fast it's cooking. Check the Temperature - To make sure that turkey is fully cooked through and through, check its temperature in three places: the breast, the outer thigh, and the inside thigh. The turkey will continue to cook once it's removed from the oven and given time to rest. We recommend you pull the turkey once it's reached 160 degrees so that it rises to a safe 165. Rest your bird for at least 20 minutes.

Rest

Lift the whole turkey (still on the rack) and transfer it to a cutting board. Tent the turkey with aluminum foil and let it rest for 20 minutes or so. This gives time for the meat to firm up and the juices to be re-absorbed into the muscle tissue, making the turkey easier to slice and taste juicier.

How to Carve a Turkey



Place the cooked turkey on a clean serving platter to collect the juices. Allow the turkey to stand at room temperature for 20 minutes to help keep the meat firmer and juicier



Carve the legs. Cut along the turkey's hip joint with your knife.



Letting the leg slowly separate from the body of the turkey



Remove the leg completely from the joint once you view the separation. The joint should snap free. If not, it can easily be cut with your knife.



Remove as much meat as you can by carving close to the body, especially near the turkey's back. Note the succulent orb of meat at the base of the back, called the oyster.



Remove the wings—don't overlook these tasty bits of dark meat with crispy skin



Carve the breasts. This is what's often called the "kitchen" method, because the turkey is carved behind the scenes and then brought to the table in slices



Don't saw or press too hard: let the weight of the knife do the work



Slice the remaining meat against the grain. Note that the thicker the slices are made, the longer they'll retain heat. If you're serving thin slices in a fan shape, don't wait – get the plates served immediately