

Differences Between Dressing And Stuffing

Turkey is often considered the “star” of Thanksgiving, but what about the dish whose name is debated yearly? Dressing and stuffing have been in a drawn-out battle over which is a better word since the dawn of time. What’s the difference between stuffing and dressing? Or are they simply the same thing?

Stuffing, a mixture of bread crumbs, seasonings, and chopped vegetables, is a favorite side dish on Thanksgiving meals. Also known as dressing, it is served in many different varieties, ranging from herb-flavored to oyster-based and even fruit-infused. While I’m sure you have your preference for which term to use, for some people, there’s not even a difference between the two.

No one really knows where stuffing originated, but one widely circulated story is based on the reason for it in the first place: poultry and other wild game needed to keep their shape after their cavities had been emptied and cleaned. Cooks stuffed birds and animals with whole vegetables before finding a mixture of stale bread and chopped vegetables. As it cooked, juices from the meat would infuse the breadcrumbs, creating a second dish.

There is no clear record of whether stuffing was present when the Pilgrims had their first Thanksgiving. While records indicate many turkeys and waterfowl are present, there is no mention of whether these birds were stuffed for the meal. As Thanksgiving meals became more common, stuffing took a much more prominent place at the holiday table, as seen in early Thanksgiving menus from the 19th century listed stuffed turkeys and hams as main courses.

Stuffing, according to Merriam-Webster, is “a seasoned mixture (as of bread crumbs, vegetables, and butter) that is typically placed inside the cavity of a turkey, pepper, etc. and cooked.” In other words, a “stuffed” mixture inside the poultry. Dressing, on the other hand, is a little less obvious. Merriam-Webster defines it as “a seasoned mixture usually used as a stuffing (as for poultry).” That means they are the same thing, right? Not exactly.

For the most part, the words dressing and stuffing are often used interchangeably. This is because they include most of the same ingredients: various vegetables, herbs, some sort of starch, and spices.

So what is the difference? Dressing and stuffing can have the same ingredients, but what makes them different is how they are cooked. Stuffing is cooked in the turkey cavity; the juices soak in, making the ingredients more flavorful.

Dressing typically gets cooked independently in a casserole dish and requires additional liquid to make it flavorful. Some people state that dressing is the proper name when prepared outside the bird and cooked in a dish.

Stuffing is generally made by mixing spices, herbs, chopped vegetables, and breadcrumbs. Additionally, dressing, especially in the American South, is often made with cornbread instead of white bread. Most recipes call for additional liquid, such as stock or broth, while others rely on pan drippings. Other ingredients, including celery, bacon, sausage, oysters, and apples, can be used in stuffing. Stuffing accompanies poultry as well as other meats, such as beef and pork.

Home cooks are advised annually to take precautions when preparing meals with stuffing by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Healthy sanitation practices, and if used inside meat or poultry, they recommend that the internal cooking temperature of stuffing reaches at least 165°F. If cooked separately from the meat, no raw meat or juices are recommended to come in contact with the dressing.

Today, a holiday meal would not be complete without this classic side dish. Whether you call it dressing or stuffing, make it from scratch or buy a boxed mix, enjoy the time with friends and family—and don't forget to thank the cook.

(Sources: www.delightedcooking.com; www.delish.com; www.fda.gov; www.merriam-webster.com; en.wikipedia.org; www.springfieldnewssun.com)