

## Safely Prepare Turkey

Hosting friends and family for Thanksgiving? Make sure you are up to date with the essential “know-hows” on safely preparing a turkey.

Food safety must be at the forefront of Thanksgiving turkey preparation, from thawing to leftovers. Use these guidelines on how to prepare, cook, and serve a Thanksgiving turkey safely.

Before shopping, you should determine the size of turkey you’ll need, usually 1 to 1 ½ pounds per person, and whether your refrigerator and oven are big enough to handle the bird.

Do not buy a pre-stuffed, raw turkey. When a turkey is stuffed, incubator-like conditions develop in the turkey’s cavity that promotes bacterial growth.

A smaller turkey will cook faster and more evenly, and the meat will be more tender. If your appliances are smaller or you have a large crowd, I recommend you cook two small turkeys. This will also provide more drumsticks for the leg lovers at your gathering.

Make sure you have a meat thermometer. Having one ready will help avoid under- or overcooking the turkey and the possibility of foodborne illness.

Older, younger, or immune-compromised family members or guests can be put in serious danger from foodborne illness and a lack of food safety. It’s important to cook the turkey to the correct temperature of 165°F or more and be mindful of sanitary food handling throughout the steps, whether preparing, cooking, carving, serving, or storing leftovers.

Thawing a turkey in the refrigerator is the best way to prevent foodborne illness. To help prevent cross-contamination, make sure the turkey is in a container on the lowest shelf to protect the other food in the refrigerator.

- *Refrigerator thawing:* The recommended method is to allow 24 hours for each 4-5 pounds of turkey weight in a refrigerator 40°F or lower. Once refrigerator-thawed, a turkey can be left in the refrigerator for one to two days before cooking.

Do not wash the turkey before cooking. Remember to remove the giblets from the turkey cavity after thawing. Cook them separately. Most people go with the tried-and-true oven method of cooking the turkey, but other techniques can be used. Whichever method you use, follow these guidelines:

- Stuffing, if added at all, should be placed in the turkey immediately prior to cooking.
- For safety’s sake, do not cook the turkey at a temp lower than 325°F.
- Turkey is unsafe to eat until it reaches 165°F or higher on a food thermometer. Don’t rely on the red pop-up temperature indicators that are provided. These are not always accurate.
- Check the temperature in three different places: the thickest part of the breast, innermost wing, and thigh.
- If you cook the turkey with stuffing, the stuffing must also reach at least 165°F.
- Allow the turkey to rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving to allow the juices to set.

Thanksgiving leftovers cannot be left out at room temperature. All perishable items should be refrigerated within two hours of coming out of the oven or refrigerator. Discard any perishable food left out at room temperature for longer than two hours! If you have more food than you can eat within four days, freeze it. Store leftovers tightly wrapped in small portions and place them in a refrigerator.

Leftovers can be kept in the refrigerator for four days. This means you have until the Monday after Thanksgiving to eat all of them. When you're ready to eat the leftovers, reheat them to an internal temperature of 165°F.

Follow these simple instructions and you'll be carving a perfectly browned turkey that you and your guests will gobble up!