

LET'S TALK TURKEY

Our simple, no-fail guide to making the best Thanksgiving bird ever.

*Don't fear the fowl! For most of us, turkey, the very food that defines the holiday, makes Thanksgiving a real challenge. Roasting turkey only once a year gives you no chance to practice, yet guests eagerly expect a golden-brown, flavorful, irresistibly moist bird. Here's everything you need to know to pick, prep, and cook a top-notch, plan-friendly turkey—including advice from holiday cooking expert **Rick Rodgers**, author of Thanksgiving 101.*

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PICK IT

Fresh or frozen? Deciding what type of turkey to buy depends on your timing as well as your refrigerator space.

frozen

PROS: Convenient—buy months ahead if you have space.

■ Inexpensive and widely available.

CONS: Takes ages to defrost. Fridge: 24 hours per five pounds of bird. Cold water bath: one hour per two pounds (changing water often to keep cold). ■ May have been pumped with salt water to counteract moisture loss during defrosting, which would affect seasoning level.

fresh

PROS: No defrosting! That means more space in the fridge for other Thanksgiving ingredients. ■

Buy one or two days before needed. If your local market suggests advance reservations, be sure to make them.

CONS: Costs more per pound than frozen. ■ Shop carefully: "Self-basting" means injected with salt water, broth, or flavorings that could interfere with your recipe.

RICK'S PICK:

"FRESH!" I normally buy mine on Tuesday night. The fresh turkeys are usually delivered the previous weekend, but the supermarket's refrigerator is colder than yours. Let the store keep your bird in its very cold fridge."

turkey terms

KOSHER Salted according to Jewish dietary laws. No-fuss; preseasoned.

ORGANIC Certified to meet USDA organic animal health and welfare standards. May cost more; may not taste different from other birds.

FREE RANGE Turkeys had outdoor access. But the rules give considerable wiggle room, so the term means little.

NATURAL The bird has been minimally processed. No artificial ingredients or added coloring.

BY DEBBIE KOENIG ● PHOTOGRAPY BY CON POULOS



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PREP IT

Ask ten experts for their favorite way to prepare a turkey, and you'll get ten different answers. Here are steps everyone agrees on:

getting started

1. First, remove the neck and giblets—which you'll find ready to go and often bagged—from the bird's body and/or neck cavities.
2. If the legs are bound together, leave them that way. That oven-safe plastic or metal thingamajig is called a "hock lock," and it saves you from having to truss the bird. If the legs are unbound, after you fill the cavity with seasonings, tie the drumsticks together with kitchen twine or unwaxed, unflavored dental floss.
3. Discard any pop-up thermometer that may have come embedded in your bird. An inexpensive, instant-read meat thermometer will be more reliable.

after that, recipes differ but the basic techniques are:

DRY BRINING This is Rodgers's preferred method and the one used in our recipe. Liberally season your bird one to three days ahead of time. This allows the flavor to penetrate deeply and produces juicy, tasty meat (no dried-out breast!), plus it requires only as much room as the turkey itself.

WET BRINING The night before your feast, submerge the turkey in salted water (roughly 1 cup kosher salt per 1 gallon water) and refrigerate overnight. This produces extremely moist meat, but many holiday-stocked fridges can't accommodate a pot that's big enough to hold all that.

EASIEST OF ALL Pull the bird from the fridge an hour before you plan to roast it, then pat dry with paper towels, season it, and go. This works especially well with self-basting or kosher turkeys (one of the few arguments that can be made for getting a preseasoned bird).

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COOK IT

This foolproof recipe makes an amazing bird, whether you start days ahead (best of all), or just an hour before sliding it into the oven.

DRY-BRINED HERBED ROAST TURKEY

PREP 20 MIN (1 TO 3 DAYS IN ADVANCE) // COOK 3½ HR // SERVES 10

- 3 Tbsp kosher salt
- 2 tsp rubbed sage
- 2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp dried rosemary
- 1 (14-lb) fresh turkey (not self-basting or kosher)
- 1 medium onion, halved
- 1 medium lemon, halved
- 1 medium carrot, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 medium celery stalk, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 3 c reduced-sodium chicken broth

ONE TO THREE DAYS AHEAD:

1. Prep your bird as follows: Combine salt and herbs in a bowl—rub mixture between your fingers to crumble herbs.
2. Remove neck and giblets from body and neck cavities of turkey and discard. Pat turkey dry inside and out with paper towels. Carefully loosen skin on breast and legs, and rub a generous tablespoon of herb mixture onto flesh. Sprinkle remaining mixture

liberally all over body and inside cavities. Seal bird in a 2½-gallon zip-close plastic bag or roasting bag, place on a plate to catch any leaks, and refrigerate 18 to 36 hours.

DAY OF MEAL:

3. One hour before cooking, remove turkey from fridge, discard bag, and pat turkey dry. (If you did not already prep the bird, remove giblets, pat dry, and season it now.) Preheat oven to 325°F. Coat a large roasting pan and rack with nonstick spray.
4. Insert onion, lemon, carrot, and celery into body cavity. Place turkey breast-side up on rack and tuck wing tips beneath body. If legs didn't come with a hock lock, tie together with kitchen twine. Add 2 c broth to roasting pan.

Roast 3 to 3½ hours (15 minutes per pound), adding enough remaining broth to prevent pan juices from evaporating, until instant-read thermometer inserted into thickest part of thigh, without touching bone, registers 165°F.

5. Transfer turkey to cutting board and tent with foil. Let rest 30 to 60 minutes. While turkey rests, strain drippings into a fat-separating pourer and set aside. Remove and discard vegetables. Carve turkey; discard skin and drizzle meat with reserved drippings (rather than gravy) before serving.

PointsPlus value per 3 oz serving:

- Roasted skinless turkey breast: 2
- Roasted skinless dark meat: 3

Rodgers's bonus cooking tips:

DON'T BOTHER BASTING

"Basting is not absolutely necessary," Rodgers says. "The bird is in the oven for hours, it'll brown regardless."

MAKE IT MOIST

To keep breast meat on a whole turkey from drying out, cover just the breast with foil before it goes in the oven. "Heat reflects away from the shiny surface so the breast cooks at a slower rate than the rest of the bird," he says. "During the last hour, remove the foil and baste the breast a couple of times with the dark pan juices, and the skin will brown."

FOLLOW FAMILY LORE

"If Grandma taught you to sew up the body cavity, that's what you have to do," he says. "It's all about tradition."



HOW BIG A BIRD?

To feed everyone seconds and have enough for next-day sandwiches, buy a bone-in turkey that weighs 1 to 1½ pounds per person.

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plan-friendly plate

A classic, satisfying Thanksgiving feast doesn't have to be a splurge. Here's how to eat, enjoy, and stay on plan.

■ If you're going back for seconds, opt for the skinless turkey instead of sides.

■ If you're having gravy, don't pour it on—drizzle it with a spoon.

■ Take a serving of each kind of vegetable (go big if they're light on butter and cream sauce).

■ If the stuffing and mashed potatoes are traditional, full-fat versions, start with a small

portion, just enough to get a satisfying taste.

■ Skip any side that doesn't make you swoon. Save those **PointsPlus** values for what you really want!

■ Wait at least 20 minutes before you go back for seconds or dessert. That gives your body time to catch up—and you may find you're not hungry for more after all.

SUPER SIDES

Turn the page for these recipes and more holiday favorites.

