

Roast Turkey

If you did not download this recipe from the Thanksgiving Roast Turkey post on my blog on Wine, travel, and Food, I suggest you go there for lots of information on the history of this recipe, lessons learned over 51 years of roasting a Turkey for Thanksgiving and other interesting background on this topic. The pictures can be very helpful. You can find that post at <https://billwinetravelfood.com/2022/11/14/thanksgiving-roast-turkey/>

INGREDIENTS – Note onion and celery are used in the stuffing, stock pot, and roasting pan and carrots are used in stock pot and roasting pan so consider all three uses when doing the Mise en Place (prep work) discussed below.

Stuffing/Dressing

For each bag of stuffing mix

16 oz bag of Pepperidge Farms stuffing mix - as many bags as needed as per note below

1 cup finely chopped yellow or sweet onion (about 1 large onion)

1 cup finely chopped celery

4 TB (1/2 stick) butter melted (for this recipe olive oil can replace butter any time that is called for to meet dietary considerations. If using butter, always use unsalted butter.)

2 cup (16 oz) chicken stock. Quart boxes of stock are recommended

1 Tb Sage

1 Tsp Marjoram

One bag should fill a small 10 – 14lb turkey. Putting extra in a pan as dressing is always appreciated and very few people can tell the difference between the stuffing and the dressing when prepared as below so making 2 bags is recommended and 3 bags with a large crowd for dinner and a big bird.

Stock Pot – if your turkey did not come with the neck and giblets inside you will need to purchase either a turkey neck or drumstick, not cooked, to use in making the stock.

Turkey neck cut into 1 ½ “pieces

Turkey heart cut into two pieces

Turkey liver cut into 1” pieces

Flat end of each Turkey wing

Onion – 1 cup or more of large pieces including head and tail and skins

Celery – 1 cup or more of 2” pieces including leaves and tail

Carrots – 1 Cup or more of 2” pieces and the head and tail of each carrot

Butter – 4 TB

Bouquet garni – Bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, and dill wrapped in cheesecloth and tied to keep the herbs inside. Can be dried or fresh herbs.

Turkey

1 turkey – fully defrosted (size by number of people. An 18 lb. large bird feeds 10 adults and 4 children with leftovers in our family).

8 TB butter (olive oil can be substituted). Make sure the butter is out of the refrigerator long enough to become very soft to butter the bird before it goes into the oven.

1 large carrots for the roasting pan

1 onion for the roasting pan

1 stalk Celery for the roasting pan

Gravy

Pan juices from roasting pan

Stock from stock pot

2+ TB Flour for roux

½ cup white wine to deglaze the roasting pan

Utensils – see blog post for discussion on what, why, and how

Cheesecloth

Roasting Pan – disposable is recommended

Roasting Rack

Bulb Baster

Poultry forks

Very large bowl for stuffing

5 Qt or larger Stock Pot that can go into the oven with a tight-fitting cover

Baking pan for dressing that fits the amount of dressing that you will be preparing

Fat separator cup

Large needle and thread that can go into the oven

Sheet pan for prep work

PREPERATION

Mis en Place

Prepping the vegetables for the stuffing, roasting pan, and stock pot the day before is highly recommended. Use of a food processor can significantly reduce prep time. If you do not have a food processor you will need to finely chop the onion and celery by hand. Putting them in zip log bags for storage overnight in the refrigerator is good. Double bagging the onion to prevent the smell from taking over the refrigerator is highly recommended. Mark the bags for stock, stuffing, or roasting pan. This is discussed more in the blog post.

Stock pot

Starting the Stock Pot the night before and leaving it overnight in a 225° electric oven will significantly help you make a rich stock. Preheat oven to 400°. Put the turkey pieces on a foil lined baking sheet in the oven at 400° for 15 minutes to slightly brown them. Reduce the oven heat to 225° for the stock to cook very slowly overnight.

Add all the vegetable ingredients and the bouquet garni. Add the browned turkey pieces from the oven. Add up water to the stock pot so the liquid is within an inch of the top and bring to a boil for 10 minutes then turn down to simmer covered until you are ready for bed. Add additional water if needed to have the pot 90% full. Put in the 225° oven overnight to continue cooking. In the morning return to the stove under a slow simmer. When the turkey goes into the oven remove the cover and reduce the stock under a slow simmer to about 2/3 of the original volume. When it has reduced to that level, put the cover back and continue under a very low simmer. About 30 minutes before the turkey comes out of the oven, right after you remove the cheesecloth, pour the stock through a fine mesh strainer to get clear stock, rinse out the stock pot

to remove any sediment, and return the clear stock to the stock pot covered under a very low simmer until it is time to make the gravy. The goal is to have about 2 quarts of rich stock so you add some water if the pot is less than half full or leave the cover off and have over medium heat until it reduces down to that level.

If you like to have chopped giblets in your gravy, remove the giblets from the strainer and set aside to add to the gravy.

Stuffing/Dressing

Stuffing is the bread mixture baked inside the turkey. Dressing is the same mixture baked separately in a pan. Based on your preferences you are welcome to do either or a mix of both as we do.

Wash your hands EVERY time you finish a step in the prep cycle where you touch the raw bird

Fully defrosting the turkey is the most important step in having a properly cooked bird on the table at your planned dinner time. See the blog post for suggestions on how to make sure you have a fully defrosted bird in time. If you are following the dressing process above, preheat your oven early enough to be at 450° when you are ready to put the turkey in. If you are following the stuffing process, your oven should already be at 450°.

Take the bird out of the wrapper in the sink so any juices go right down the drain. You should NOT rinse any poultry products before cooking. That process splatters raw juices all over and can create a serious risk of infection. The poultry will be cooked to a temperature well above what is necessary to kill all bacteria so rinsing it first does no good and can spread salmonella instead of preventing it. This has been well documented by respected chefs on a number of cooking shows.

Take the package of cheese cloth and cut off a piece that can be doubled over and cover the body of the turkey not including the wings. This will cover the bird and help it stay moist during the long cooking process. More on this in the blog post.

Melt ½ stick of butter or put 4 oz of olive oil in a deep fry pan large enough to hold the chopped onion and celery with room to turn it so all of it cooks. Add the onion and celery and saute for 10-15 minutes on medium high heat turning the ingredients. Those that go into stuffing will cook inside the bird but those that go into dressing will only get 45 minutes in a pan in the oven on medium heat so they should be precooked.

Add the stuffing to a very large bowl, see the picture and discussion on Utensils in the blog post. Pour the cooked onion & celery mix over the top and use a spatula to get the butter from that pan into the bowl. Add the stock and butter or olive oil and mix thoroughly. To really get it mixed thoroughly, you can use your hands to work the very moist mixture together and get all the ingredients mixed evenly throughout. This Roast Turkey is a hands-on process.

Stuffing

Preheat the oven to 450° so the bird can go in shortly after you have it stuffed.

The bowl of stuffing mixture can sit for about an hour before putting into the bird but should not sit for longer than that so starting this process at least 90-120 minutes before you plan to put the bird in the oven is recommended. Make a note of how long it takes you from starting the

stuffing until you have the bird ready to go in the oven so you know how much prep time to plan for in future years. It is also recommended that you thread the needle for sewing up the bird before putting in the stuffing so you are working with clean hands.

If putting stuffing inside the bird, stuff the main cavity first. Putting the bird in a sheet pan to catch bits of stuffing that don't get into the bird is a good idea. You can use a large spoon to get most of the stuffing in but probably will need to finish getting all the stuffing in by hand. Fill the cavity fully but don't pack it in tightly. Sew up the front cavity, turn the bird over and stuff the back cavity. The large flap of skin from the neck can form a nice pocket to hold the stuffing. Again, do not pack it in tightly, just put in enough so it is full when you bring the skin up to the back of the bird so you can sew it closed but with a nice bulge where the stuffing is filling the large flap of skin. Sew up the back cavity. Turn the bird to breast side up in the sheet pan.

The bird should not sit fully stuffed for more than 30 minutes before it goes into the oven or bacteria can form in the stuffing that is not killed by the baking.

Dressing

Make the dressing using the above process starting 2 hours before the turkey is due to come out of the oven. It should take about 30-45 minutes to have it all together and in a baking pan greased with butter or olive oil. Cover with foil until you want to put it in the oven.

For each bag of stuffing that you used, add 1 cup of stock from the stock pot (before it is reduced by half) spread over the pan to give some turkey flavor. The dressing should go into the oven 15 minutes before the turkey is scheduled to come out. Bake covered in foil at 325° for 45 minutes. If your oven will hold both at the same time, this pan can go in with the turkey on a separate rack for that first 15 minutes. If not it will need to go into a second oven or you will need to rest your turkey for 40 minutes instead of 30 minutes to give the dressing 45 minutes in the oven.

Turkey

The neck and bag of internal organs should have been removed the prior day for the stock pot. Check the inside to be sure the bird is fully defrosted. Spray cooking oil in your roasting pan and on the rack and put the rack in the roasting pan. Distribute the large pieces of onion, carrot, and celery around the bottom of the roasting pan. They will cook down and add to the flavor of the pan juices.

Take one stick of softened butter and cut it into two 4 TB pieces. Melt one 4 TB piece of butter in a small fry pan large enough to hold the folded cheesecloth so it will soak up the butter but don't put the cheesecloth in yet. Turn off the heat so the butter is not really hot when you put the cheesecloth in later. You can substitute 4 TB of olive oil for the butter.

Take half of the other 4 TB piece of softened butter that was not melted in the pan in your hands and rub it liberally all over the breast side of the bird. Rub the drumsticks and try to get butter into all the crevices. Pick up the bird, flip it over, and put it on the rack in the baking pan back side up. Liberally butter the back side of the bird including the wings. Use all the softened butter and use your fingers to get as much of the butter off them and back onto the bird when you are finished. Large clumps of soft butter are fine on the bird. Again, olive oil can be substituted for the butter.

Take your dry cheesecloth and wipe off your hands capturing as much of the residual butter as possible. Wash your hands. Fold up the cheesecloth so that it will fit into the fry pan with the butter and put it in the pan and push it down to soak up all of the melted butter. Carefully flip it over. You want the cheesecloth to be fully soaked in butter and be able to be unfolded easily to go on the bird when it is time.

The bird is now ready to cook and should not sit for more than about 10 minutes before it goes into the oven so you need to make sure you have preheated your oven to 450° early enough so the bird can go right into the hot oven at this stage. If you worked carefully and consistently it should be about 2 hours or a little less from when you started working on the stuffing. If your timing is different from that, adjust what time you will sit down to eat forward or backward. You can't do anything to shorten the cooking cycle of the bird.

COOKING

The primary challenge in roasting a turkey is that the dark meat on the back side cooks slower than the breast meat because it is on the bottom and the breast is out under the heat of the oven. To get them both done at the same time and very moist and juicy, I do two things. The first is to put the bird into the oven back side up for the first 30 minutes (up to 40 minutes for a bird over 20 lbs.) of cooking so it gets hot first and the dark meat continues to cook when the bird is flipped and goes breast side up. The second thing I do is to cover the breast with butter or oil soaked cheesecloth. This provides some insulation so the breast meat cooks a little slower and the basting also helps keep it moist.

Put the bird in the 450° oven back side up, breast side down. Let it cook for 30-40 minutes. Take the pan out of the oven and put it on a surface where it can take the heat and is stable. Use the poultry forks to lift the bird and flip it to breast side up. It works much better with another person using potholders to hold the pan with one hand and the rack with the other while you flip the bird. It is very difficult to do by yourself and the pan contains very hot oil that will burn badly and make a huge mess if spilled in any way. BE VERY CAREFUL AT THIS STEP. IT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT OF THE ENTIRE PROCESS. More discussion on this process in the blog post.

Put the bird back in the oven. After 20 minutes reduce the heat to the final cooking temperature (see below). Right after you turn down the oven to final cooking temperature, take the bird out of the oven and carefully put on the cheesecloth soaked in butter over the bird. Unfold the cheesecloth and drape it over starting at the bottom of the bird and then up to the neck cavity. Tuck it under the wings and make sure it is even on the bird. Tongs can help getting the hot wings out of the way to tuck the cloth down around the bird. Both the drumsticks should be mostly if not fully covered. Return the turkey to the oven.

COOKING TIMES AND TEMPS

<u>Bird size</u>	<u>Final Cooking Temp*</u>	<u>Cooking Time</u>
10 – 16 lb.	350°	20 minutes per lb.
17 - 25 lb.	325°	18 minutes per lb.

*Final Cooking Temp is the temperature you set the oven to 20 minutes after you flip the bird 50–60 minutes after it went into the oven. Cooking times can differ significantly based on your oven. Adjust based on your experience with your oven.

The above cooking times are a guideline. You want to cook the turkey to an internal temperature of 165-170° and make sure both the breast meat and the thigh meat are at that temperature. Most often the thigh is the last to get to the needed temperature. If your turkey came with a pop-up thermometer, that is a pretty good indication of when the breast is done but I use an instant read digital thermometer to check the temperature of the thigh and the breast. I start checking that when I remove the cheesecloth and do not take the bird out of the oven until the thigh is at that temperature. Any lower temperature than that carries a risk of infection. Halfway through the cooking cycle rotate the pan 180° in the oven so that any hot spots hit different parts of the bird.

30 minutes before the end of the cooking time, remove the pan from the oven and again put it on a surface that can take the heat and is very stable. Using tongs, slowly and carefully peel the hot cheesecloth off the bird. There may be spots where the skin sticks to the cheesecloth and starts to rip. Work all four corners of the cheesecloth to get as much off as possible without tearing. Using a very sharp paring knife you can carefully scrape down the cheesecloth towards the bird and free the skin with little tearing. Set the cheesecloth aside, baste the bird one time using a bulb baster, and return to the oven for about 30 minutes for final browning.

When both the breast and the thigh have hit the target internal temperature, transfer the bird to the carving board and let it sit for 30 minutes for the juices to be absorbed back into the meat. If you carve it too soon, the juices will run and the meat will taste dry. Suggestions on carving are in the blog post.

GRAVY (Grammy Beth's Gravy recipe)

Drain the pan drippings into a fat separator cup and let the fat settle to the top. Deglaze the pan with the white wine to get any drippings left stuck to the bottom and pour that into the fat separator cup and let it stand for a few minutes for the fat to all rise to the top. Pour the drippings into a saucepan over a low heat on the stove and add as much of your turkey stock as you want for the quantity of gravy you want to have, holding back $\frac{3}{4}$ cup to make the roux to thicken the gravy. Consider leftover meals when deciding how much gravy to make. You can also add chicken stock if you want more than you have with the turkey stock. If you don't want about 2 quarts of gravy, just add enough stock to get to the quantity that you want. The remaining stock can be refrigerated or frozen and used to make soup or other recipes calling for chicken stock.

In a small bowl put 2 TB of flour and 4 TB of stock and whisk together to make a roux. Add the roux to the saucepan and stir to thicken the gravy over medium low heat. There is a wide variety of opinion on how thick the gravy should be. Add additional roux incrementally until you get to the thickness you want. Using 1 TB of flour and 2 TB of stock each time lets you take small steps to get to the thickness your family likes. Let the gravy absorb each increment and cook for a few minutes to get to the final thickness it will have with the amount of roux that you have added before adding more roux. When the gravy is at the thickness you like, add any remaining stock that you had reserved to the gravy.

If your family likes to have the giblets in the gravy, chop them up and add them once you have the quantity and thickness of gravy that you want.