



## Cooperative Extension

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

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### How much turkey should I buy?

Allow for 1 to 1 ½ pounds of uncooked turkey per person. This will yield approximately 10 ounces of cooked turkey meat per person – enough for a filling meal and leftovers.

### Should I buy a fresh or frozen turkey?

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service inspects both fresh and frozen poultry. The quality is the same. Whether you select a fresh or frozen bird is simply a matter of personal preference. Fresh turkeys need no thawing and are ready to cook. Frozen turkeys can be purchased months in advance – just remember to plan enough thawing time before roasting!

Prior to 1997, poultry could be sold as "fresh," even if it was frozen. Today, the definitions of "fresh" and "frozen" turkey are intended to meet the expectations of consumers buying poultry:

- Frozen Turkey – Raw turkey held at a temperature of 0°F or below must be labeled "frozen" or "previously frozen."
- Fresh Turkey – Turkey that has never been below 26°F, i.e. not hard-to-the-touch or frozen solid, may be labeled "fresh."

All raw turkey (fresh or frozen) can be kept safe when stored at 40°F or below.

### Where can I find fresh turkey in New Jersey?

Many local farm markets, butchers, and grocery stores sell fresh turkeys at Thanksgiving. Check with them about ordering, purchasing, and availability. Be sure to plan ahead. Most retailers require that you place turkey orders in advance.

Local farms are a wonderful source of fresh meats and produce. "Shopping local" is a great way to promote sustainability in your local community. By purchasing your Thanksgiving turkey and other holiday ingredients from a local farmer, you receive quality products at their peak freshness. You also give back to your local economy by increasing jobs in your area and providing farmers with money that will be reinvested into your community. There are also environmental benefits, such as decreased transportation and fuel usage that go along with buying local. To find a farm in your area that carries fresh turkey and other Thanksgiving necessities, go to [www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov](http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov) and [www.VisitNJFarms.org](http://www.VisitNJFarms.org).

### Can you explain some of the words I'm reading on the turkey label?

As with any food product, poultry manufacturers use the food label to describe the product they're selling. These are some of the more common terms on a turkey's label:

- **Basted or Self-Basted:** Turkeys that are injected or marinated with a solution containing butter or edible fat, broth, stock or water, plus spices, flavor enhancers, and other approved substances. (Be sure to check the nutrition label. Many “basted” turkeys can be high in sodium.)
- **Free Range or Free Roaming:** A turkey that has been allowed access outside while being raised.
- **Fryer-Roaster Turkey:** A young turkey, usually less than 16 weeks of age and of either gender.
- **Hen or Tom Turkey:** The gender designation of “hen” (female) or “tom” (male) turkey is optional on the label and is an indication of size rather than tenderness.
- **Kosher:** Designates turkeys prepared under rabbinical supervision.
- **No Antibiotics:** This term may be used on labels for turkey if the producer sufficiently documents to the Food Safety Inspection Service that the birds were raised without antibiotics.
- **Minimal Processing:** Minimally processed turkeys could include:
  - o Traditional processes used to make food edible or to preserve it or to make it safe for human consumption, i.e., smoking, roasting, freezing, drying, and fermenting
  - o Physical processes that do not fundamentally alter the raw product, or that only separate a whole turkey into parts or grinding of the turkey
- **Natural:** Contains no artificial flavor or flavoring, coloring ingredients, chemical preservatives, or any other artificial or synthetic ingredient and is minimally processed. The label must explain the use of the term “natural,” i.e., no added colorings or artificial ingredients or minimally processed.
- **No Hormones:** Synthetic hormones are not permitted to be used when raising poultry, although all animals, including turkeys, contain their own natural hormones. Therefore, this claim cannot be used on turkey labels unless it is followed by a statement that says: “Federal regulation prohibit the use of synthetic hormones.”
- **Organic:** Produced using sustainable agricultural production practices. Organic animal products are raised without the use of antibiotics or growth hormones. Farms and handling facilities that comply with USDA organic regulations are allowed to sell, label, and represent their products as organic by using the word “organic” or featuring the USDA organic seal on their turkey labels.



The USDA National Organic Program administers these regulations, with substantial input from its citizen advisory board and the public.



## How should I handle my turkey so it's safe to eat?

- Fresh or frozen turkey will remain safe with proper handling and storage.
- Keep fresh, raw turkey cold to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and to increase its shelf life. Select fresh turkey just before checking out at the store register. Put it in a disposable plastic bag by itself to contain any leakage that could cross-contaminate cooked foods or fresh produce.
- At home, immediately place fresh, raw turkey on a plate or tray in the refrigerator (keep temperature at 35° to 40°F) if you will use it within 1 to 2 days. Or, freeze the turkey at 0°F. Frozen turkey will stay safe indefinitely. For best quality, use it within 1 year. (If you're freezing a turkey for longer than 2 months, wrap the porous store plastic package with air-tight, heavy-duty foil, freezer plastic wrap, freezer bags, or freezer paper to prevent “freezer burn.”)
- When defrosting turkey in the refrigerator, place it on a tray, platter, or large plate to contain any leakage that could cross-contaminate cooked foods or fresh produce. Then, position it on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator to prevent leakage from dripping on foods on lower shelves.
- Roast fresh turkey as soon as possible, but no later than the “use by” date on the package.
- Wash hands for 20 seconds, using warm running water and soap, before and after you handle raw turkey.
- Place raw poultry on non-porous surfaces; these are the easiest to clean and sanitize. Avoid wooden cutting boards.
- Use paper towels, not cloth, to dry off turkey and wipe up juices.
- Use a sanitizing cleaner on all work-surfaces before and after turkey touches them. This assures that you kill harmful bacteria. You can make your own sanitizing cleaner by mixing 1 tablespoon of bleach with 1 quart of water. Wash counters and other surfaces with this solution, and make sure they remain wet for 10 minutes, then allow to air-dry before working on them.
- Wash all utensils that touch the raw turkey and its juices with hot, soapy water.
- If stuffing the turkey, stuff just before roasting, not the night before, as this can increase the spread of bacteria to the stuffing.

- Cook turkey (and stuffing, if it is inside of the turkey) to an internal temperature of 165°F. Use a meat thermometer to check for doneness.
- Refrigerate or freeze turkey, stuffing, gravy, broth, and other cooked foods within 2 hours after cooking. Don't let them sit out at room temperature to cool first.

## How should I defrost (thaw) my turkey?

After purchase, frozen turkeys should be placed in a freezer until ready to be thawed. There are three safe ways to thaw a turkey:

1. **Refrigerator:** It is best to plan ahead for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator. Your turkey will require at least a day (24 hours) for every 5 pounds of turkey weight.

Once thawed in the refrigerator, turkey can remain refrigerated for a day or two before cooking. Turkey thawed in the refrigerator can be safely refrozen without cooking, although there may be some loss of quality.

Turkey Size	Days to Defrost
8-12 Pounds	1-2 Days
12-16 Pounds	2-3 Days
16-20 Pounds	3-4 Days
20-24 Pounds	4-5 Days
24-28 Pounds	5-6 Days

2. **Cold Water:** This method is faster than refrigerator thawing, but requires more attention. The turkey should be in leak-proof packaging or a plastic bag. Submerge the turkey in cold tap water, changing the water every 30 minutes. It will take about 30 minutes per pound. After thawing, refrigerate the turkey and cook it promptly. Turkey thawed by the cold water method should be cooked before refreezing.
3. **Microwave:** All microwaves are different. Check the manufacturer's instructions for the size turkey that will fit into your oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. After microwave thawing, cook the turkey immediately, because some areas of the turkey may become warm and begin to cook. Holding partially cooked food is never recommended. Any bacteria present will not be destroyed in the microwave, and the turkey may reach temperatures at which bacteria can grow while in the microwave. Foods thawed in the microwave should be cooked before refreezing.

## What's the proper way to stuff a turkey?

As with any preparation involving raw food ingredient, it's important to carefully follow proper food safety and handling procedures to ensure safe turkey and stuffing every time. For consumers who choose to stuff their turkeys, follow these guidelines:

- Prepare stuffing just before placing it in the turkey. Use only cooked ingredients in stuffing – sautéed vegetables, cooked meats and seafood (such as sausage or oysters), and use pasteurized products instead of raw eggs.
- Place prepared stuffing in the turkey, just before roasting. Do NOT stuff the turkey the night before roasting.
- Allow ½ to ¾ cup of stuffing per pound of turkey. Do not over-stuff or pack stuffing tightly into the turkey.
- Try making your stuffing outside of the turkey. Place stuffing ingredients in a casserole dish and alongside of your turkey. Making the stuffing outside of the turkey prevents bacteria growth and overcooking of your turkey.

## How should I roast my turkey?

Regardless of your recipe or your cooking method, these tips offer superb strategies to assure that your turkey is tasty and safe to eat.

- If you marinate your turkey, marinate in the refrigerator, not on a counter or at room temperature. Never re-use the marinade; discard after you're finished marinating.
- Place a thawed or fresh turkey, breast up, on a flat rack in a shallow pan, 2 to 2 ½ inches deep.
- Insert an oven-safe meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh. Place turkey in a preheated 325°F oven. Avoid recipes that recommend slow cooking at temperatures below 325°F. Lower temperatures won't kill bacteria.
- When the skin is a light, golden color and the turkey is about two-thirds done, shield the breast loosely with a tent of lightweight foil to prevent overcooking of the breast.
- Use our roasting schedule as a guide for cooking. Start checking for doneness ½ hour before the recommended end time. But remember, your meat thermometer is the only reliable way to tell when the turkey is done. Always cook turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F.
- To check stuffing doneness (if cooking inside of your turkey), move the meat thermometer to the center of the stuffing. The stuffing temperature should be at 165°F.

## What is the right way to use a meat thermometer?

Using a meat thermometer is the only reliable way to ensure safety and to determine the "doneness" of your turkey and side dishes.

- To be safe, food must be cooked to an internal temperature high enough to destroy any harmful bacteria that may be present.
- In fact, one of the critical factors in controlling bacteria in food is controlling temperature.
- Bacteria grow very slowly at low temperatures (40°F and below), multiply rapidly in mid-range temperatures (the "Danger Zone" – 41 - 145°F), and are killed at





temperatures above 165°F. It is essential to use a meat thermometer when cooking your food to prevent undercooking and, consequently, prevent foodborne illness.

- For a thermometer to work properly, it must be placed in the food correctly. Generally, the thermometer should be fully inserted into the thickest part or center of a food.
- At least 2 ½ inches of the probe must be inserted into the food. If you are unsure of proper placement, check the temperature again in a different spot.
- If you are using an oven-safe meat thermometer, insert the thermometer prior to placing the turkey in the oven and leave it in while the turkey is roasting. Turn the thermometer so it can be read while the turkey is in the oven.
- If you are using an instant-read meat thermometer, do not leave the thermometer in the turkey during roasting; the dial may melt.
- When cooking turkey, the thermometer should be inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. It should be placed just above and beyond the lower part of the thighbone, but not touching the bone, and pointed to the breast. See photo.
- Turkey is done when it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.
- If you are cooking turkey parts, insert the thermometer into the thickest area, avoiding the bone. The thermometer may be inserted side-ways if necessary.
- To determine if casseroles and other combination side dishes are finished cooking, place the thermometer into the thickest portion of the food or the center of the dish. Combination casseroles, such as stuffing, must reach 165°F. Egg dishes and dishes using ground meat and poultry should be checked in several places.

- If your stuffing is inside of the turkey, the center of the stuffing should be checked after the thigh reads 165°F. The stuffing must also reach 165°F.

## How can I tell when the turkey and stuffing are done?

Turkey and stuffing are done when the meat thermometer reaches 165°F.

## How long can Thanksgiving dinner sit out before it is unsafe to eat?

Thoroughly cooking food before you serve it helps kill most harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness, but cooking's effects won't last forever. Serve food carefully to keep food safe:

- Discard foods that have been held at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- If you're serving from a buffet line, use small platters for replenishing the serving table. Prepare them ahead of time and store in the refrigerator (40°F or below), or keep hot (140°F or higher) until ready to replenish the serving line.
- Never add fresh food to a serving dish or platter containing foods that have already been out for serving.
- Serve food on clean dishes – not those used in preparation – to avoid cross-contamination.

## How can I keep leftovers safe?

Having leftover food for a few extra meals (or snacks) can be one of the best things about Thanksgiving. Just remember, food won't keep forever! Store it only for a limited time and store it carefully to keep it fresh and safe.

- Debone turkey, and refrigerate or freeze all leftovers within 2 hours of cooking.
- Remove stuffing from turkey and store separately.
- Date leftovers and use within a safe time.
- Use small, shallow containers (maximum depth = 2 inches) for quick cooling.
- Don't over-pack the refrigerator. Leave air space around containers or packages so cold air can circulate and help ensure rapid, even cooling.

Turkey Weight (lb)	Estimated Time for Unstuffed Turkey	Estimated Time for Stuffed Turkey
8-12	2 ¾ - 3 hours	3 - 3 ½ hours
12-14	3 - 3 ¾ hours	3 ½ - 4 hours
14-18	3 ¾ - 4 ¼ hours	4 - 4 ½ hours
18-20	4 ¼ - 4 ½ hours	4 ½ - 4 ¾ hours
20-24	4 ½ - 5 hours	4 ¾ - 5 ¼ hours
24-28	5 - 5 ¾ hours	5 ¼ - 5 ¾ hours

## How long will leftovers keep?

Use refrigerator leftover turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days, gravy within 1 to 2 days, or freeze these foods.

Remember, you can't always smell, taste, or see bacteria. Storage time is your best guide to determine whether a food can be reheated or should be discarded. Don't trust your senses to guide you. Food may look or smell fine, even when it's covered with harmful bacteria.

## How should I reheat leftovers?

Heat sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil.

Cover and reheat leftovers to 165°F.

Microwave leftovers in microwave-safe containers, using a lid or vented plastic wrap. If the microwave doesn't have a turntable, turn the entire dish several times during cooking time. Always stir soups, stews, stuffing, and gravies several times during cooking. And, always check for doneness with a thermometer.

What's microwave safe? Glass cookware, glass ceramic cookware, and waxed paper are safe for microwave cooking.

Plastic wrap may be used to cover containers, but should not touch the food. Before using other types of containers, wraps, or paper products, check to make sure that they are approved for use in the microwave. Unapproved materials may melt, burn, or contain chemicals that can migrate into food during cooking.

Contact FCHS at your local Rutgers Cooperative Extension office for information on programs and resources available in your county. Need help finding us? Visit <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/county> for a statewide directory.



### Food Safety Resources for Additional Information:

#### Rutgers Cooperative Extension

FS585 – Shopping for Food Safely - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS585>

FS586 – Storing Food Safely at Home - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS586>

E340 – Home Storage of Foods: Refrigerator and Freezer Storage - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=E340>

FS274 - Home Storage of Foods, Part II: Shelf Storage - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS274>

FS587 – Preparing Food Safely - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS587>

FS588 – Handling Leftovers Safely - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS588>

FS589 – Serving Food Safely - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/publication.asp?pid=FS589>

Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS) Home Page - <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs>

#### Other Useful Resources

<http://www.foodsafety.gov>

<http://www.fightbac.org>

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# Turkey Anytime: A Recipe for Turning Leftovers into Planned-Overs

Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RD, Extension Educator, University of Nebraska Lincoln

Part of the pleasure of a Thanksgiving or other holiday meal is the aroma of a turkey baking in the oven. Continue that great feeling by planning a variety of pleasing post-holiday meals with leftover turkey. Try these recipes, created by University of Nebraska Extension, or use them as inspiration for your own! Turkey makes a great first meal plus delicious leftovers that are easy to combine into a variety of scrumptious future meals.

## Turkey and Cranberry Salad

(Serves 4)

1 ½ cups turkey, cooked and diced

¼ cup vinaigrette dressing

1 cup dried cranberries or cherries

2 tablespoons sliced almonds

Lettuce leaves

Toss chicken, cranberries, and almonds with dressing. Serve on a lettuce leaf or mound of chopped lettuce.

## White Turkey Chili

(Serves 8)

1 tablespoon oil

1/4 cup onion, chopped

1 cup celery, chopped

4 cups cooked turkey, chopped

2 cans (15.5 oz.) Great Northern beans, drained

2 cans (11 oz.) corn, undrained

1 can (4 oz.) chopped green chilies

4 cups turkey or chicken broth

1 teaspoon ground cumin

Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add onion and celery, cook and stir 2-3 minutes. Place all ingredients in a large saucepan (at least 4 quarts). Stir well. Cover and cook about 15 minutes over medium heat stirring occasionally until thoroughly heated.

Source: Mary Torell, Public Information Officer, Nebraska Dept. of Agriculture, Poultry and Egg Division

## Turkey Stew

(Serves 4)

2 teaspoons vegetable-oil

1/2 cup chopped onion

1 finely chopped garlic clove  
or 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

4 chopped carrots

2 chopped celery stalks

2 chopped potatoes

1 can (15 ounce) tomatoes, diced

2 cups water

2 cups chopped, cooked turkey

Italian seasoning or oregano, basil  
or thyme to taste

Salt and pepper to taste

Heat oil in medium saucepan. Add onion, garlic, carrots and celery and stir two minutes. Add potatoes, tomatoes, and water to pan. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Add turkey and cook another five minutes or until heated. Season to taste before serving.

Source: Adapted from: Montana Extension Nutrition Education Program Website Recipes

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