Homes & Gardens

Town Tribune Weekly Guide To Fall Living



Tips to simplify Thanksgiving entertaining

Preparing Thanksgiving dinner for a houseful of close friends and relatives can be a tad overwhelming. Thanksgiving is a food- and tradition-centric holiday, and all eyes will are typically on the dinner table. Pulling off a feast of this magnitude — multiple courses, side dishes and desserts — takes considerable effort. These tips, tricks and timesavers can be a Thanksgiving host's saving grace.

Pick the menu early

Don't leave menu planning and shopping to the last minute. Decide what you'll be cooking in addition to turkey several weeks before the big day. Select two or three side dishes, preferably items that can be prepared in advance and then reheated on Thanksgiving. These can include a baked macaroni-and-cheese casserole, mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables, and a cornbread stuffing.

Brine your bird

Turkey is the centerpiece of the feast, so give it every opportunity to shine. No one wants a dry turkey, but unfortunately this lean poultry can dry out easily. Meats typically lose about 30 percent of their weight during cooking. However, by soaking the turkey in a brine prior to cooking it, you can reduce this moisture loss to as little as 15 percent, according to Dr. Estes Reynolds, a brining expert at the University of Georgia. Brining the fowl for a day or more can infuse flavor and moisture. Food Network personality Alton Brown has a fan-favorite roast turkey recipe with an aromatic brine that has garnered five stars and was featured on his show "Good Eats" (www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/good-eats-roast-turkey-recipe-1950271). A simple salted water soak also can work.

Start prep work a few days before Thanksgiving

Take some stress out of Thanksgiving by cutting all vegetables and/or preparing some dishes a few days early. Label and organize prepared ingredients by recipe and store in the refrigerator. Make extra room in the fridge by removing nonessential items and placing them in a cooler with ice and cleaning out any old food or condiments. Plan your table settings and label which bowls and other serving dishes will be used for which items. This will make it much easier to set the table on Thanksgiving.

Serve batched cocktails

It can be challenging and expensive to have a full bar for guests. Mulled wine, hot cider and punches are ideal ways to service a crowd looking for delicious spirited drinks.

Create simple centerpieces

Use seasonal sights for your centerpieces or place settings. These can include small squashes, gourds, citrus fruits, nuts, or acorns. A hollowed-out pumpkin filled with fresh flowers also can be eye-catching.

Thanksgiving is a time to celebrate bounty. Treat guests to a great experience by learning some hosting tips to make the holiday easier to manage.

Consider these 13 gratifying Thanksgiving facts

Thanksgiving is a time to gather with family and friends and reflect on one's blessings. In 2022, Canadian Thanksgiving takes place on October 10, while Americans celebrate on November 24. In anticipation of these holidays, here are some interesting facts about the Thanksgiving celebration.

1. American Thanksgiving is largely modeled on a 17th century harvest feast shared by the English settlers and the Wampanoag tribe.

2. Canadians celebrate Thanksgiving on the second Monday of October. It is based on European harvest festivals.

3. The National Turkey Federation says around 45 million turkeys will be eaten on Thanksgiving, which equates to about 720 million pounds of turkey being consumed (with the average turkey size being 16 pounds).

4. The Butterball hotline answers roughly 100,000 calls every year on its turkey question hotline.

5. In 1953, the Swanson company overestimated the number of frozen turkeys it would sell for the holiday season by 26 tons. Rather than waste the meat, Swanson sliced it up, repackaged it and created the first frozen TV dinners.

6. Thanksgiving in America may be older than many recognize. While Thanksgiving is largely tied to the 17th century settlers, the National Parks Service says in 1565 Spanish settlers in St. Augustine (now Florida) celebrated by having a meal to which they invited the native Seloy tribe. The Spanish served pork stew, sea biscuits, red wine, and garbanzo beans. Some say the Seloy contributed turkey, venison and maize.



7. Thanksgiving didn't become a civic holiday until Abraham Lincoln made it one after the Civil War tragedy. Thanksgiving was declared a national holiday on October 20, 1864.

8. The Pilgrims did not refer to themselves as "pilgrims." They used the word "separatists" as they were separating themselves from a larger belief system.

9. In addition to Canada and the United States, Grenada, Liberia, the Philippines, Saint Lucia, and the Netherlands celebrate their own versions of Thanksgiving.

10. Each year, the American president "pardons" a turkey from slaughter on Thanksgiving. This tradition dates back to when Abraham Lincoln's son was upset that his family's turkey that was going to be killed for Thanksgiving dinner.

11. According to the U.S. Calorie Control Council (CCC), an average American may consume 4,500 calories and 229 grams of fat on Thanksgiving Day.

12. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is an annual tradition. People line the parade route in New York City or tune in to watch the parade on television. It originated in 1924 and the famed balloons were added in 1927.

13. Apple pie is the pie of choice for Thanksgiving, even though pumpkin pie is prevalent this time of year.

Thanksgiving is a popular holiday in Canada and the U.S. Many traditions have been borne of the holiday, and it is a favorite time of year for many people.



How to avoid dry turkey this Thanksgiving

Turkey is the centerpiece of Thanksgiving dinners. The National Turkey Federation estimates approximately 46 million turkeys are consumed on Thanksgiving each year, followed by 22 million turkeys at Christmastime.

Turkey makes a pleasing picture on the dinner table. However, some people insist that turkey is their least favorite component of the Thanksgiving meal. One of the biggest complaints is turkey tends to be dry.

There are many reasons why turkey can come out dry. Turkey is a lean meat, and Healthline reports that turkey has slightly less fat in its dark meat than chicken. Another reason why turkey may be dry is due to its poor breast-to-leg ratio. By the time one gets the leg meat to cook to temperature so it's safe for consumption, the breast meat often has dried out. Seeing how many people dive for the breast meat initially, they could dish up some dry bird.

There are many ways home cooks can prevent dry turkey this Thanksgiving. Consider these turkey-tending tips.

- **Brine your bird.** According to ScienceBlogs, what causes a human to perceive a food as juicy may actually be his or her own saliva at work. Salty foods may stimulate the production of saliva in the mouth, helping the food to feel much more moist while on the palate. To adequately inject enough salt into the turkey meat, submerge it in a salt brine for a few days before cooking.
- **Watch your cook time.** It's important to avoid overcooking the turkey, which will turn it as dry as the Sahara. Some turkeys come equipped with pop-up timers to help cooks gauge when to take them out of the oven. However, a more accurate tool is a digital food thermometer that can be set to go off when the turkey reaches the correct internal temperature.
- **Cook the turkey parts separately.** As previously noted, the breast meat will likely reach the desired temperature before the leg meat. To fix this, take the turkey out of the oven when it reaches five to 10 degrees before safe temperature for the breast meat, around 165 F. (Remember, the meat will continue to cook while "resting.") Let guests "ooh and aah" over the picture-perfect turkey. Then cut off the legs and return them to the oven until they are done. Arrange the properly cooked breast and leg meat together on a serving platter.
- **Offer condiments.** A moist dollop of stuffing, a drizzle of gravy or a scoop of cranberry sauce can add moisture to turkey. This approach does not prevent drying out, but it can make a turkey that has dried out a bit more satisfying.

Dry turkey can put off diners. However, some strategies can harness as much moisture as possible to enhance Thanksgiving dinners.