

How to eat Thanksgiving

Don't know what to do? Don't know where to start? Here's a guide to keep you on track for the perfect Thanksgiving meal.



Turkey



Hosting

Sides

First week in November

Pre-order a fresh turkey from your local grocer or online.

Don't know what kind of turkey to get? Here are your main options:

- Natural
 - No artificial ingredients.
- Heritage
 - Purebred, old breeds of birds. Often juicier and more flavorful, but more expensive.
- Kosher
 - These are pre-brined. (And kosher, duh.)
- Organic
 - No antibiotics or animal by-products in feed.
 - Fresh and frozen.
- Self-basting
 - Pre-brined. Read label to know with what.

Two weeks before Thanksgiving

Plan the menu and guest list. Be realistic.

★ Pro tip: Aim for a later dinner time. Candles make every meal better. Plus, you think you'll have plenty of time to clean, but you won't, and candlelight goes a long way to hide the dust.

Make note of dietary restrictions of guests. Revise the menu and guest list. Read each recipe making sure there's time and space to make everything. Seriously, be realistic.

★ Pro tip: Look for recipes that use the same oven temperature so they can cook at the same time.

Need vegan sides? We've got a ton at splendidtable.org/thanksgiving/.



Make two shopping lists.

The first is for things you'll need in advance, and the other for fresh items to be purchased the day before the meal.

Weekend before Thanksgiving

If you didn't pre-order a turkey, you'll probably have to go with a frozen one. Get it soon.

Clean out the fridge. You'll need the space. (And it needs to be done anyway.)



Do your knives need sharpening? Do it today before things get crazy.

Check for staples: cream, butter, coffee, spices, flour, corn starch, canned stock, etc.

Go shopping with the first list.

Monday

Start defrosting frozen turkey.

How long will it take to defrost a frozen turkey? Figure 1 day per 5 pounds in the refrigerator (e.g. 10 lbs=2 days, 20 lbs=4 days), or half an hour per 5 pounds in cool water (e.g. 10 lbs=5 hours, 20 lbs=10 hours). Be sure to change the cool water every half an hour.

Clean the house.

Yeah, we thought that was funny too. Just make it look presentable. Fresh flowers help. And don't forget the candles.

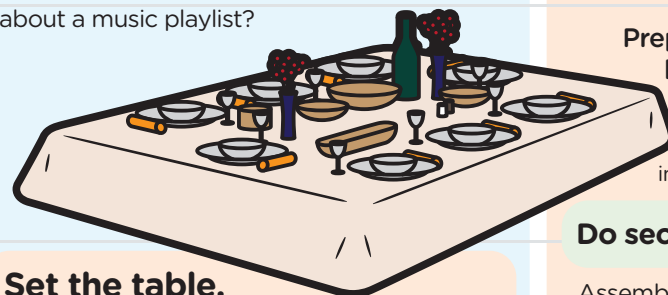
★ Pro tip: If you make and bake your pie crusts today, your pies should stay soggy-bottom free.

Making stuffing from scratch? Seriously? Whatever. Cube the bread and dry.

Tuesday

Pick up fresh turkey.

If you need it, start making ice. And what about a music playlist?



Prepare things that can be chilled and stored.

Cranberry sauce, soups, appetizer dips, etc. get better after a few days in the fridge.

Do second shopping trip.

Wednesday

If you're brining, today's the day.

If you still don't have a turkey, you might be running out of options. Here are some ideas:

- 1) Turkey parts. They cook faster.
- 2) Frozen game hens. They're smaller, so they defrost and cook faster.
- 3) A cooked ham. (But don't get a frozen ham!)
- 4) How about a Tofurkey?

Set the table.

Now might be a good time to make sure you have the numbers for the local ER and poison control center. I'm not saying. I'm just saying.

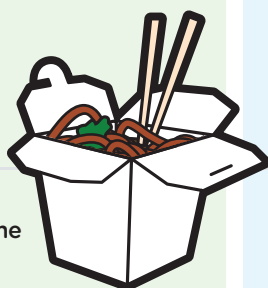
Assemble casseroles, stuffing, etc. and store in the fridge uncooked. Bake sweet potatoes today for final prep tomorrow.

If you have one oven, bake your pies today.

Thanksgiving morning

Time to cook that bird!

How long to cook?
Roast 13-15 minutes per pound at 325° or until thigh registers 165°-170°.



Just starting to think about dinner? Yikes! Call around for reservations. Maybe it's time for a traditional Chinese takeout meal.

Tune in to Turkey Confidential, 2 hours of live culinary triage on the day you need it most!



If you have two ovens, bake your pies today.

During dinner



Chill the wine.

Warm the desserts in oven and make coffee.



End of the day

Turkey freezes well, so strip the bird, refrigerate what you can use in the next 5 days, and freeze the rest. Freezing dries the turkey a bit, so keep some broth or gravy as well.

Be thankful.

For more Thanksgiving help, visit The Splendid Table at splendidtable.org.

And tune into your local public radio station for Turkey Confidential on Thanksgiving.