

Tips to simplify Thanksgiving entertaining

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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 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



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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% 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%, according to Dr. Estes Reynolds, a brin-

ing 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.

How to avoid dry turkey this Thanksgiving

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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 Christmas.

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 cooking 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.



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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.

Crustless pie a treat for those with gluten intolerance

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The holiday season is a popular time to entertain. Food is often a focal point of holiday season entertaining.

Individuals who navigate food allergies or intolerances may shy away from certain celebrations out of fear that a nibble of this or a bite of that may trigger an allergic response. In such instances, concern about ingredients can cast a pall over normally festive occasions.

Those with Celiac disease or gluten intolerances must be mindful of the foods they consume. Meals or desserts containing gluten, a protein found in grains like wheat, semolina, rye, barley, graham, spelt, farina and more, can trigger intestinal distress and other symptoms. With delicious pies, cakes and cookies on the holiday serving table, gluten is likely to make an appearance. However, with careful planning, people who cannot stomach foods that contain gluten can still indulge in their favorite holiday flavors.

"Crustless Libby's Famous Pumpkin Pie" is a variation on traditional pumpkin pie served at Thanksgiving and Christmas gath-

erings. Without the crust, individuals who avoid gluten can still dive into that pumpkin-and-spice combination that's so popular around the holiday season. Enjoy this recipe, courtesy of Libby's Pumpkin.

Crustless Libby's Famous Pumpkin Pie
Makes 8 servings

- ✓ 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- ✓ 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ✓ 1/2 teaspoon salt
- ✓ 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- ✓ 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- ✓ 2 large eggs
- ✓ 1 can (15 ounces) Libby's 100% Pure Pumpkin
- ✓ 1 can (12 fluid ounces) Nestlé Carnation Evaporated Milk
- ✓ Nonstick cooking spray
- ✓ Whipped cream (optional)

1. Preheat oven as directed below. Glass baking dishes without crust require a cooler oven, and in most cases, a longer baking time.

2. Spray baking dish with nonstick cooking spray or lightly grease bottom of baking pan or baking dish.

3. Mix sugar, cinnamon, salt, ginger and cloves in a small bowl. Beat eggs in a large bowl. Stir in pumpkin and sugar-spice mixture. Gradually stir in evaporated milk.

4. Bake as directed below or until a knife inserted near center comes out clean.

5. Cool on wire rack for two hours. Serve immediately or refrigerate.

Cooking Times

- ✓ 9-inch-round glass pie dish: 325 F; bake for 55 to 60 minutes

✓ 10-inch-round glass pie dish: 325 F; bake for 45 to 50 minutes

✓ 8-inch-round cake pan: 350 F; bake for 45 to 50 minutes

✓ 9-inch-round cake pan: 350 F; bake for 35 to 40 minutes

✓ 8-inch-square baking pan: 350 F; bake for 45 to 50 minutes

✓ 8-inch-square glass baking dish:

325 F; 50 to 60 minutes

✓ 9-inch-square baking dish: 350 F; bake for 35 to 40 minutes

✓ 11-by-7-inch glass baking dish: 325 F; bake for 45 to 50 minutes

✓ 13-by-9-inch baking pan: 350 F; bake for 35 to 40 minutes

✓ 13-by-9-inch glass baking dish: 325 F; bake for 40 to 45 minutes

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