

# Turkey Tips

from the Benton-Franklin Health District

<p><b>Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Size</b>—Plan on 1 pound of turkey for each dinner guest. (1 ½ pounds per person if you have hungry eaters or you want lots of leftovers.)</li><li>• <b>Fresh/frozen</b>—There is no quality difference between fresh and frozen turkeys. Frozen turkeys often cost less, but require thawing. Fresh turkeys do not require thawing, but are often 20¢ more per pound than frozen turkeys and may require special order. Cook fresh or thawed turkeys within 2 days.</li><li>• <b>Storage</b>—Clear a space in your refrigerator before you buy the bird. Protect your other foods from the raw turkey germs—keep the bird in a container that doesn't leak or <b>BELOW</b> all of your other foods.</li><li>• <b>Stop</b> at the grocery store last. Your turkey will need to get in the refrigerator as soon as possible. Remember cold foods need to stay cold and hot foods need to stay hot for food safety!</li></ul>	<p><b>Handwashing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Handwashing is critical for food safety.</li><li>• Wash with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.</li><li>• Wash before you work with food.</li><li>• Wash your hands and all kitchen tools after handling raw meat.</li><li>• Also wash your hands after caring for animals or children, eating or going to the bathroom.</li></ul> <p>For more information, read the Benton-Franklin Health District brochure on <a href="#">handwashing</a></p>	<p><b>Cleaning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Germs (bacteria and viruses) are everywhere. Clean to remove as many germs as possible!</li><li>• Use clean utensils with food.</li><li>• Wash all counters and other food contact surfaces before, during and after food prep.</li><li>• A sanitizer can help destroy germs that cleaning leaves behind.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <b>Sanitizer recipe:</b> Mix 1 teaspoon bleach in 1 gallon cold water.</li></ul></li></ul> <p>Wipe the sanitizer on the cleaned item and allow the sanitizer to air dry.</p>
<p><b>Where does my turkey come from, anyway?</b></p> <p>From farm to table—here's the scoop from the <a href="#">USDA</a>.</p>	<p><b>What do all those words on the label mean?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>BASTED</b>—injected or marinated</li><li>• <b>FREE RANGE</b>—allowed access to the outdoors</li><li>• <b>FRESH</b>—turkeys have not been frozen or stored at a temperature colder than 26°F</li><li>• <b>YOUNG</b>—A male or female turkey under 8 months of age</li><li>• <b>FRYER-ROASTER</b>—A male or female turkey under 16 weeks of age</li><li>• <b>HEN</b>—female</li><li>• <b>TOM</b>—male</li><li>• <b>NATURAL</b>—No added <i>artificial</i> colorings, flavorings, chemical preservatives or other synthetic ingredients</li><li>• <b>HORMONES</b>—There are <b>NO</b> FDA-approved hormones that are allowed to be used on turkeys</li></ul>	<p><b>Thawing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The safest method to thaw your turkey is in the refrigerator. Allow 24 hours for each 4 pounds of turkey. (The average 16lb turkey would take 4 full days to thaw--Refrigerate Sunday morning in order to thaw by Thursday morning!)</li><li>• For faster thawing, thaw in cold water in the sink. Allow 30 minutes per pound of turkey. Make sure there are no holes in the packaging and that you change the water every 30 minutes (to keep the water cold).</li><li>• Small turkeys can also be defrosted in the microwave (check your microwave owner's manual). Once food is defrosted in the microwave, it must be cooked right away (microwave defrosting actually begins the cooking process).</li></ul>

### To stuff or not to stuff—

Cooking a stuffed turkey is a higher risk than cooking an unstuffed turkey.

Here are a few tips to make it safer:

- Prepare stuffing safely—right before you stuff and bake the bird.
- Make sure the stuffing is “done”—it should reach 165°F. Be sure to check the stuffing temperature with a thermometer. Stuffing may not be hot enough even if the rest of the bird is hot—make sure the stuffing gets “up to temp” too!
- “Standing time” You may let the cooked bird stand for 20 minutes to let the juices set. Remove all stuffing after the standing time.
- Refrigerate leftover stuffing in shallow containers. Use within 1-2 days.

### Cooking

We recommend a 325°F oven for cooking safely. “Slow roasting” at lower temps may not be safe (too many bacteria will have a chance to grow) and is not recommended.

These times for *thawed* turkeys are guidelines, please be sure to temp the bird to ensure it is cooked (the inner thigh should be 180°F and the stuffing should be 165°F)

Unstuffed Turkey	
8-12 lbs	2.75-3 hours
12-14 lbs	3-3.75 hours
14-18 lbs	3.75-4.25 hours
18-20 lbs	4.25-4.5 hours
20-24 lbs	4.5-5 hours

Stuffed Turkey	
8-12 lbs	3-3.5 hours
12-14 lbs	3.5-4 hours
14-18 lbs	4-4.25 hours
18-20 lbs	4.25-4.75 hours
20-24 lbs	4.75-5.25 hours

To speed cooking:

- Cover the container with a lid or use a oven cooking bag (you’ll save about 30-60 minutes)
- Make sure turkey is completely thawed
- Use a dark roasting pan
- Don’t stuff the bird
- 2 10-pound turkeys will roast faster than 1 20 pound turkey.

### Alternate cooking methods

#### Interested in trying

- Electric roasting ovens
- Brown paper bags—don’t do this one! (Paper bags might have inks, glues or materials that could cause fumes/contamination.)
- BBQ
- Smoking
- Deep fat frying
- Microwaving
- Pressure cookers
- A frozen turkey

#### More info

[USDA Turkey Cooking Tips](#)

### Is it done?

- Whole poultry should be cooked to 180°F (when measured in the dark meat deep in the thigh) to ensure that illness-causing bacteria are destroyed.
- Whole chickens give visual indicators when they are done—flesh will no longer be pink, the juices will be clear, joints (like the drumstick) will move easily.
- There aren’t visual indicators for stuffing temperatures. Make sure to temp with a thermometer. Minimum temperature for stuffing is 165°F.

#### More info

Make sure you use an *accurate* thermometer and read the BFHD brochure on [Thermometer Use](#).

### Aack!!! What about pink meat?

Even though turkey (and other meats) are cooked to the proper temperature to kill illness-causing bacteria, the meat still might be “pink.” The pinkness is generally due to the muscle cells of the bird, and do not mean the meat is undercooked.

If the temperature of the meat at the inner thigh is 180°F, all the meat – including that which is pink--is safe to eat.

#### More info

Pink Turkey Meat from the [USDA](#)

### The aftermath. (AKA leftovers)

- Be sure to refrigerate leftover foods in shallow containers within 2 hours of cooking.
- Turkey (and other large pieces of meat) should be removed from the bone and cut into small pieces for rapid cooling.
- Refrigerated leftovers should be used within 4 days. Leftover stuffing and gravy should be used within 2 days. Frozen leftovers will last about 1 month.

Oops, I accidentally cooked the giblets in the bag. Can we eat them?

Yes—if the giblets were in a paper bag or a plastic bag that did not melt, they and the turkey should be safe to eat. If the giblets were in a plastic bag that melted, neither the turkey nor the giblets should be eaten.

Giblet safety from the [USDA](#):

Is it safe to cook a frozen turkey?

Yes—if you do not stuff the turkey. The cooking time will take at least 50% longer than recommended times for a fully-thawed turkey. Be sure the thigh temperature reaches 180 degrees F.

Where is the meat thermometer supposed to go in the turkey?

**Whole turkey**—in the thigh.

**Turkey breast**—in the thickest portion of the meat (not touching the bone).

**Stuffing**—in the center of the stuffing.

Second-time around

Leftovers should be reheated to 165°F within 1 hour. Heat gravy to a rolling boil.

Other links:

Turkey Facts/Trivia from [National Turkey Federation](#)

Butterball's [Top 10 caller questions](#)

USDA's information on [Roasting Other Meats](#)

Sending perishable [food by mail](#) from the USDA

How the pop-up timer in the turkey works from [HowStuffWorks](#)

Basic food safety tips—Fight Bac Campaign [www.fightbac.org](#)

**Questions about food safety???**

Benton-Franklin Health District,  
(509) 460-4205



Enjoy your holiday. Our office will be closed November 27 & 28, 2014 for Thanksgiving.

Keep safe and healthy.