



Roasting Those “Other” Holiday Meats

No doubt about it, holiday time is turkey time. Of the 266 million turkeys produced in 2006, 30 percent are served during the holidays. Yet numerous other meats are also traditional at holiday gatherings. Some families choose a rib roast; others, a ham; and some will have the butcher arrange a crown roast of lamb.

If a hunter's in the clan, that family may serve wild game such as duck, venison or pheasant. Small families may opt for a bird smaller than a turkey — such as capon, duck, goose or Cornish hen — or a small cut of meat like a pork tenderloin or veal roast.

Whatever the choice, have a food thermometer on hand to determine when the meat has reached a safe temperature. For special holiday meals, the cook wants everything perfect — and perfectly safe.

The Safety of Special Holiday Meats

When choosing your holiday meat, be assured that all beef, lamb, pork, veal and poultry sold at your supermarket have been inspected for wholesomeness by the USDA or State inspection systems. Once your purchase is at home, refrigerate it immediately. Cook or freeze fresh poultry within 1 or 2 days; fresh meats, 3 to 5 days.

There are two types of hams: fully cooked and those that need cooking. Fully cooked hams may be eaten cold or reheated to 140 °F. When storing these hams, observe “use-by” dates on hams sealed at the plant; use store-wrapped cooked ham portions within 3 to 5 days. “Cook-before-eating” hams must be cooked to 160 °F to destroy harmful bacteria that may be present. Use within 7 days.

Wild game killed by hunters obviously has not been federally or state inspected so care must be taken to handle it safely. Parasites such as *Trichinella* and *Toxoplasma* may be present. Improper handling can cause bacterial contamination as well as off-flavors.

Dress game in the field right after shooting. Dressed meat must be chilled as soon as possible. Keep the game cold — below 40 °F, until it can be cooked or frozen. *For more information about wild game, call State or county extension offices.*

About Roasting

Because holidays are special times, people tend to spend more money for a specialty meat. These fancy meats and poultry may cost more because they are exceptionally tender or special.

Roasting is the recommended method for cooking tender meats. To roast, meat is placed on a rack in a shallow, uncovered pan and is cooked by the indirect dry heat of an oven. To keep the meat tender and minimize shrinkage due to the evaporation of moisture, a moderately low oven temperature of 325 °F should be used.

The USDA does not recommend cooking meat and poultry at oven temperatures lower than 325 °F because these foods could remain in the “Danger Zone” (temperatures of 40 ° to 140 °F) too long. Bacteria which may be present on these foods multiply rapidly at these temperatures.

Boned and rolled meats require more cooking time per pound than bone-in cuts because it takes longer for the heat to penetrate through the solid meat.

Background Information about Holiday Meats

BEEF

Beef is leaner these days so roasting cuts from the rib, tenderloin, and eye round to medium rare (145 °F) keeps these roasts tender and juicy.

LAMB

Technically, “Spring lamb” is meat from lambs slaughtered from March to the first week in October. The term comes from olden times when lambs born in harsh winter weather would have little chance to survive until the next year. Today with more protected animal husbandry conditions, enjoying “lamb” — meat from sheep about one year old, is not confined to a particular season of the year.

Some people may view lamb as a fatty meat. However, leg and loin lamb meat has a similar fat content to lean beef and pork loin when trimmed of visible fat. The “fell” is a paper-like covering on lamb and is usually removed from steaks and chops at the retail market. Leave it on leg roasts to help retain shape.

Cook lamb to 145 °F (medium rare), 160 °F (medium) or to 170 °F (well done) as measured with a food thermometer.

PORK

Because hogs are about 50 percent leaner than they were 25 years ago, today’s pork cooks faster and can dry out when overcooked. Years ago when pork had more fat than it does today, the meat could be overcooked and still be fairly tender and flavorful.

Cook fresh pork to 160 °F. Fresh pork cooked to medium doneness as measured with a food thermometer may still be pale pink inside but will be safe. Heating to 160 °F kills foodborne bacteria — such as *Salmonella* — as well as parasites that cause trichinosis and toxoplasmosis.

WILD GAME

To remove the “gamey” flavor, soak wild meat or poultry in a solution of either 1 tablespoon salt or 1 cup vinegar per quart of cold water. Use enough solution to cover the game completely and soak it overnight in the refrigerator. Discard the soaking solution before cooking.

Wild game is leaner than its domestically raised counterpart. Trim any visible fat — that’s where a gamey flavor can reside. Then roast tender cuts of venison and game birds (if skinned) covered with oil-soaked cheesecloth or strips of bacon to prevent the meat from drying out. Set them on a rack in a shallow pan and roast in the oven at 325 °F.

For tenderness and doneness, whole game birds should be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast with a food thermometer.

DUCK and GOOSE

Most domestic ducks are the breed called White Pekin. The term “Long Island” duck is a trade name. Domestic ducklings have a great deal of fat. While it helps them float when swimming, fat is undesirable in a cooked duck. Therefore, it’s recommended to prick or score the skin of a whole duck before cooking so much of the fat will render out.

Although domestic geese are larger than ducks, they are cooked in the same manner. Oven cooking bags are helpful for cooking these birds because they hold the fat for easy disposal and keep the oven spatter-free.

CAPONS and CORNISH HENS

These specialty birds are chickens. Cornish hens are small broiler-fryers weighing 1 to 2 pounds. Capons are male chickens which are surgically unsexed; weighing about 4 to 7 pounds, they have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Roast them as you would any chicken.

HOLIDAY MEAT ROASTING CHART

For approximate cooking times to use in meal planning, see the following chart compiled from various resources. *Use a food thermometer* to determine that meats reach a safe minimum internal temperature.

RED MEAT, TYPE	OVEN °F	TIMING	INTERNAL TEMP °F
BEEF, FRESH			
Beef, rib roast, bone-in; 4 to 8 pounds	325	23 to 30 min/lb 27 to 38 min/lb	145 med. rare 160 medium
Beef, rib roast, boneless; 4 pounds	325	39 to 43 min/lb	145
Beef, eye round roast; 2 to 3 pounds	325	20 to 22 min/lb	145
Beef, tenderloin roast, whole; 4 to 6 lbs	425	45-60 minutes total	145
Beef, tenderloin roast, half; 2 to 3 lbs	425	35-45 minutes total	145
LAMB			
Lamb, leg, bone-in; 5 to 9 pounds Lamb, leg, boneless; 4 to 7 pounds	325	20-26 min/lb 26-30 min/lb 30-35 min/lb	145 med. rare 160 medium 170 well done
Lamb, crown roast; 3 to 4 pounds	375	20-30 min/lb	Same as above.
PORK, FRESH			
Pork, loin roast, bone-in; 3 to 5 pounds	325	20-25 min/lb	160
Pork, loin roast, boneless; 2 to 4 pounds	325	23-33 min/lb	160
Pork, crown roast; 6 to 10 lbs	325	20-25 min/lb	160
Pork, tenderloin; 1/2 to 1 1/2 lbs.	425	20-30 minutes total	160
PORK, CURED			
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; Whole, 14 to 16 pounds	325	18-20 min/lb	160
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; Half, 7 to 8 pounds		22-25 min/lb	160
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; Whole, 14 to 16 pounds	325	15-18 min/lb	140
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; Half, 7 to 8 pounds		18-25 min/lb	140
Ham, fully cooked, boneless; 3 to 4 lbs	325	27-33 min/lb	140
Ham, country, dried	(see label)	(see label)	(see label directions)
VEAL			
Veal, boneless roast, rump or shoulder; 2 to 3 pounds	325	25-30 min/lb 31-35 min/lb 34-40 min/lb	145 med. rare 160 medium 170 well done
Veal, bone-in roast, loin; 3 to 4 pounds	325	30-34 min/lb 34-36 min/lb 38-40 min/lb	145 med. rare 160 medium 170 well done
VENISON			
Venison, round, rump, loin, or rib roast; 3 to 4 pounds	325	20-25 min/lb	160

SPECIALTY POULTRY ROASTING CHART

For approximate cooking times to use in meal planning, see the following chart compiled from various resources. *Use a food thermometer* to determine that poultry reaches a safe minimum internal temperature.

NOTE: Times are for unstuffed poultry. Add 15 to 30 minutes for stuffed birds. The internal temperature should reach 165 °F in the center of the stuffing.

TYPE OF POULTRY	OVEN °F	TIMING	INTERNAL TEMP °F
CAPON, whole; 4 to 8 pounds	375	20 to 30 min/lb	165
CORNISH HENS, whole; 18 to 24 oz.	350	50 to 60 minutes total	165
DUCK, domestic, whole	375	20 min/lb	165
DUCK, wild, whole	350	18 to 20 min/lb	165
GOOSE, domestic or wild, whole	325	20 to 25 min/lb	165
PHEASANT, young, whole; 2 pounds	350	30 min/lb	165
QUAIL, whole	425	20 minutes total	165

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7.



AskKaren.gov