

Turkey and Other Poultry

No doubt about it, millions of Americans view holiday time as “turkey time.” Of the millions of turkeys produced every year, 30 percent are served at Thanksgiving and Christmas. But no matter when you are preparing and serving your turkey — gobble up these important facts first!

Choosing Your Turkey

When selecting your turkey, allow **1 pound of turkey per person** for fresh or frozen; 1¼ pound per person for frozen pre-stuffed.

- **Frozen:** Make sure you have adequate space in your freezer.
- **Fresh:** Purchase it 1 to 2 days before cooking. Refrigerate on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak.
- **Frozen Pre-stuffed:** Check packaging for the USDA or State mark of inspection, which ensures that it has been processed under controlled conditions. Follow package directions carefully for storage and cooking. **DO NOT THAW** before cooking. Cook from the frozen state.
- **Safety Alert:** Do not buy a fresh pre-stuffed turkey, as bacteria spreads easily from the bird to the stuffing.

Thawing Your Turkey

For basic food thawing recommendations, see the *Thawing* section on page 16.

In addition, keep these turkey-specific timelines and tips in mind:

- **In the Microwave:** Check the manufacturer’s instructions for the size turkey that will fit into your oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Remove any outside wrapping and place on a microwave-safe dish to catch any juices that may drip. Cook immediately after thawing.
- **For Frozen Turkeys:** Forget to thaw? It’s safe to cook a turkey from the frozen state. Keep in mind that cooking will take **at least 50 percent longer** than with a fully thawed turkey.
- **About refreezing:** Decide not to cook? A turkey that has been safely thawed in the refrigerator can be refrozen safely.
- After thawing, poultry may be left in the refrigerator for up to 2 days before cooking.

Turkey Thawing Chart: Approximate Timelines

Turkey Size	In the Refrigerator (Approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 lbs.)	In Cold Water (Approximately 30 minutes per lb.)
4 to 12 pounds	1 to 3 days	2 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	3 to 4 days	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	4 to 5 days	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	5 to 6 days	10 to 12 hours

Stuffing Your Turkey

- For more even cooking, cook your stuffing outside the bird in a casserole dish. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The center should reach 165 °F.
- If you choose to stuff your turkey, keep wet and dry ingredients separate and combine just before stuffing.
 - If preparing ahead of time, chill all of the wet ingredients (butter/margarine, cooked celery and onions, broth, etc.).
 - Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment. Fill the cavities loosely.
 - **Cook the turkey immediately.** Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches 165 °F.



Stuffing Other Poultry

Just as with turkey, it’s important to take special precautions with other stuffed poultry to ensure they reach a safe minimum internal temperature. Bacteria grow particularly well in starchy or “breadly” foods. In raw poultry, it can get into the stuffing, which in turn may not heat to safe temperatures when deep inside the bird. See *Stuffing Your Turkey*.

Got Giblets?

- Remember to remove the giblets from the turkey cavities after thawing. Cook them separately.

Prevent Cross-Contamination!

Always wash hands with soap and warm water before and after contact with raw poultry or its juices. Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, the sink, and countertops with hot, soapy water.