



USDA Photo

## Turkey Basics: Safe Cooking

**A food thermometer should be used to ensure a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F has been reached to destroy bacteria and prevent foodborne illness.**

Many variables can affect the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- A partially frozen turkey requires longer cooking.
- A stuffed turkey takes longer to cook.
- The oven may heat food unevenly.
- Temperature of the oven may be inaccurate.
- Dark roasting pans cook faster than shiny metals.
- The depth and size of the pan can reduce heat circulation to all areas of the turkey.
- The use of a foil tent for the entire time can slow cooking.
- Use of the roasting pan's lid speeds cooking.
- An oven cooking bag can accelerate cooking time.
- The rack position can have an affect on even cooking and heat circulation.
- A turkey or its pan may be too large for the oven, thus blocking heat circulation.

### ROASTING INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 °F.** Preheating is not necessary.

**2. Be sure the turkey is completely thawed.** Times are based on fresh or thawed birds at a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below.

**3. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2 1/2 inches deep.**

Optional steps:

- Tuck wing tips back under shoulders of bird (called "akimbo").
- Add one-half cup water to the bottom of the pan.
- In the beginning, a tent of aluminum foil may be placed loosely over the breast of the turkey for the first 1 to 1 1/2 hours, then removed for browning. Or, a tent of foil may be placed over the turkey after the turkey has reached the desired golden brown color.

**4. For optimum safety, cook stuffing in a casserole.** If stuffing your turkey, mix ingredients just before stuffing it; stuff loosely. Additional time is required for the turkey and stuffing to reach a safe minimum internal temperature (see chart).

**5. For safety and doneness, the internal temperature should be checked with a food thermometer.**

The temperature of the turkey and the center of the stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F. Check the temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.

**6. Let the bird stand 20 minutes before removing stuffing and carving.**

### APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES (325 °F oven temperature)

#### UNSTUFFED (time in hours)

4 to 6 lb breast.....	1 1/2 to 2 1/4
6 to 8 lb breast.....	2 1/4 to 3 1/4
8 to 12 lbs.....	2 3/4 to 3
12 to 14 lbs.....	3 to 3 3/4
14 to 18 lbs.....	3 3/4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs.....	4 1/4 to 4 1/2
20 to 24 lbs.....	4 1/2 to 5

#### STUFFED (time in hours)

8 to 12 lbs.....	3 to 3 1/2
12 to 14 lbs.....	3 1/2 to 4
14 to 18 lbs.....	4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs.....	4 1/4 to 4 3/4
20 to 24 lbs.....	4 3/4 to 5 1/4

### More Ways to Cook a Turkey

For other cooking methods, read the publication "Turkey: Alternate Routes to the Table" at [www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Turkey\\_Alt\\_Routes/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Turkey_Alt_Routes/index.asp).



**Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline  
1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**

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.

Send E-mail questions to [MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov).

### AskKaren.gov

For automated responses via the Internet 24 hours a day.

