

Cooking the Perfect Thanksgiving Turkey

By Emma Lopez

Thanksgiving is almost here, and many people are getting ready to cook their holiday turkey. Whether you are new to hosting or have done it for years, a few simple tips can help your meal turn out safe and delicious.

If your turkey is frozen, plan ahead and give it plenty of time to thaw. The safest way is to keep it in the refrigerator, allowing about one day for every four to five pounds. A 16-pound turkey, for example, will take around four days to thaw completely. If you need to speed up the process, place the turkey in a cold-water bath, changing the water every 30 minutes. Never thaw a turkey on the counter, since room temperatures allow bacteria to grow quickly.

When preparing your turkey, always wash your hands before and after handling it, and clean any surfaces or utensils that touch the raw meat. Do not rinse the turkey itself, as this can spread bacteria around the kitchen instead of removing it.

Once the turkey is ready to cook, set your oven to 325°F and roast it until it reaches a safe internal temperature of 165°F. Check the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh, and the stuffing if you have filled the cavity. If any part is below that temperature, continue cooking until it reaches 165°F throughout.

After the turkey comes out of the oven, let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes before carving. This helps the juices settle, keeping the meat tender and moist.

Once the meal is over, store leftovers in the refrigerator within two hours. Divide large portions into smaller containers for quicker cooling, and use them within three to four days. You can also freeze turkey for up to three months.

Cooking a Thanksgiving turkey does not have to be stressful. With good planning, safe handling, and a food thermometer, you can serve a meal that everyone will be thankful for.

Monthly Class: Freeze-Drying 101

Interested in learning how to preserve your favorite foods? Join our Freeze-Drying 101 class held every 2nd Monday of the month at 5:30 p.m.! This class will teach you how to use our freeze dryer and explore its many benefits. To register or learn more, contact the USU Extension office in Juab County by calling 435-623-3450 or emailing emma.lopez@usu.edu.