

Ask an Expert – Make a Marvelous Thanksgiving Meal – with or without the Turkey

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Turkeys may not be as easy to purchase this year as they have been in previous years. According to the USDA, frozen turkey inventories are 24 percent below their three-year average volumes, and production of turkeys is down compared to the average year.

The problem is not only the availability of turkeys, but also supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and the increased costs of feeding and moving turkeys, among other concerns. According to, Jennifer Blackhurst, University of Iowa professor of business analytics, prices will be 3.5-4.5% higher this year.

With that said, these challenges don't mean you have to miss out on a great Thanksgiving meal. Even if you don't end up purchasing a turkey this year, you can still keep many traditions or start new ones. Alternatives to turkey include pork chops, roast beef, ham, steak, chicken, pot roast, meatloaf, ribs, seafood (tuna, cod, salmon), and shellfish (shrimp, crab, lobster, scallops, clams), among others. Just because it's a tradition to eat turkey doesn't mean you have to – whatever your family enjoys most can be your main course.

As you shop for and prepare your Thanksgiving feast, Utah State University Extension's Create Better Health (SNAP-Ed) program offers tips to help.

- Plan recipes and make ingredient lists now. Check supermarket flyers before you shop.

- Use mobile coupon apps to help you find the best prices. Apps and cash-back programs are available at your fingertips. Try combining deals to maximize every dollar.
- Dial it back and keep it simple. If ingredients are expensive or your time is limited, reduce the number of items on the menu. Pick your favorites, and forget the rest. Also, don't be afraid to make food assignments to others attending your gathering. This helps to share traditions as well as the workload, and reduces the cost to the host.
- Substitute canned or frozen vegetables to cut costs and save time. Frozen veggies are just as nutritious as fresh.
- Put leftovers to good use. To ensure leftovers won't be forgotten or tossed, have a plan for their use in advance. For recipes and inspiration, check out these [Thanksgiving leftover ideas](#). Included are recipes for turkey, pumpkin, sweet potatoes/yams, cranberries, and mashed potatoes.
- Enjoy more time with your love ones by simplifying your prep time using alternative recipes or cooking methods. Also involve your loved ones in the preparation. Time spent together in the kitchen can provide an opportunity for bonding and making happy memories.

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