

# Guide to Roasting THE PERFECT TURKEY

**GOAL:** To achieve a succulent, out-of-this-world tasting turkey – the centre piece of your feast.

We start with a quality turkey from The Healthy Butcher. We then take the turkey, pamper it in a salty bath, stuff it with a classic stuffing if your heart so desires, and massage it with herbed butter before roasting it to perfection. Don't forget to match the turkey with a couple of nice wines. A Sauvignon Blanc, or a medium-bodied Zinfandel should pair well with the turkey, cranberry sauce, and other traditional side dishes. And enjoy the leftovers as much as the dinner!

## **SIZING YOUR TURKEY:**

To figure out how big of a turkey you need (in pounds), multiply the number of guests by 1.3, then round up. For example: For 11 guests, your turkey should weigh 15 lb (11 x 1.3 = 14.3). However, don't hesitate to buy larger turkeys; freeze the extra cooked turkey and you'll have quick dinners - use the leftovers for stir-fry dishes, pizzas, fajitas, chilis, sandwiches, salads and soups.

## **BRINING:**

DON'T SKIP THIS STEP. Brining is very easy and it involves only a little work the night before you roast your turkey. Trust us, it's worth it! Brining is a process whereby the turkey is submerged in a salt-water solution. The process of osmosis (some food scientists refer to it as "diffusion") takes place which seeks to equalize the amount of salt on the outside of the turkey with the amount of salt on the inside. Ultimately, the brine will increase the succulence of poultry ten-fold. In addition, the real advantage of the brining process is that you can add other spices, herbs, flavorings, etc. into the salt water solution and it will get drawn into the meat as well and thereby flavour the meat.

If you are using The Healthy Butcher's Poultry Brine, simply follow the instructions on the label. Basically, dissolve 1 cup of brine mixture for every 10lbs of turkey, then cool the mixture. If you are making your own brine, here is a recipe we suggest:

## **Brine Recipe:**

- 1½ cup kosher salt
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 bunch fresh thyme
- 1 bunch fresh sage
- 3 tablespoons black pepper corns, coarsely ground
- 2 bay leaves, torn into pieces
- 1 head of garlic, cloves separated and peeled

The salt you choose is very important. Kosher salt works better. And the finer the salt, the less you need.

## **Instructions for Brining:**

Clean the turkey by removing the giblets and any pin feathers. Rinse well under cold tap water. Heat 2 litres of water in a pot, add all brine ingredients into the water, and stir until the salt and sugar are fully dissolved. Chill the brine mixture in the fridge. Add another 3 litres of cold water to the brine.

For the steeping, you can use a pail, a deep roasting pan, casserole dish, or other container big enough to house the turkey and place it in your fridge. Or, if you don't have such a container in your arsenal, use two heavy-duty, unscented plastic bags (not made of recycled materials), and put the turkey with the brine in the doubled-bag. Then, you can place the bagged-and-steeped turkey in an ice cooler with a significant supply of ice to ensure the turkey stays cold. The goal in either method is to submerge the bird completely, therefore add more water if needed. If you're using a roasting pan and the turkey is not completely submerged, turn the turkey every few hours and cover with plastic wrap each time. If you're using the garbage bag method, squeeze out as much air as possible and close each bag separately. Make sure to place a bag of ice or other weighted object on the top of the turkey to ensure it stays submerged and does not float to the top.

Brine for up to 24 hours for very large birds but avoid over-brining which will result in a salty bird; overnight for 8 hours or so tends to work perfectly for most turkeys. If you brine for too long, you risk the chance of over-salting the turkey. Before seasoning or stuffing, remove the turkey from the brine, rinse with cold water, and dry with paper towels.

*"Eat organic food. Or, as your grandparents called it; food."*

## SEASONING, STUFFING AND GRAVY:

There is no shortage of stuffing and gravy recipes in cookbooks and on the Internet. And we at The Healthy Butcher will gladly recommend recipes if you request. But, what it comes down to is this - if you are going to stuff *The Perfect Turkey* or make a gravy, we recommend following the recipe that your Mom uses, your Grandma uses, or the one your Aunt Fill-in-the-blank uses year-after-year. Roasted turkey is a comfort food – use a recipe that closely resembles what you associate stuffing and gravy to taste like during this occasion. That recipe will yield the best results for you and your family. Be sure to stuff the turkey right before cooking (not the day before) to avoid the growth of bacteria in your stuffing.

We do, however, strongly suggest the following buttering of your home-made butterball before roasting:

Make a herb butter by blending the following ingredients in a food processor:

- 8 tablespoons (one stick) softened unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon chopped shallot
- 1 teaspoon chopped garlic
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives
- 1 tablespoon chopped sage
- 1 tablespoon chopped thyme
- 1 teaspoon chopped tarragon

Before cooking your turkey, slide a small rubber spatula between the skin and the breast meat to separate them. Use a spoon and your fingertips to spread about half of the herb butter evenly over the whole breast area. Rub the remaining butter all over the outside of the bird. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty – the fat from the turkey combined with the butter will leave your skin feeling soft and supple. 😊

Season the inside of the cavity with salt, pepper, and two quartered onions.

## ROASTING:

Pre-heat your oven to 325°F (163°C). Higher temperatures may toughen protein and cause shrinkage. Although not essential, a cup or two of stock added to the bottom of the roasting pan increases moistness. A thermometer is essential for accuracy in cooking a large turkey.

Roast the turkey, breast-side up, until a thermometer inserted into the thigh reads 165°F (74°C) for an unstuffed turkey or 175-180°F (80°C) for a stuffed turkey. (See roasting chart below for approximate roasting times). Yes, we know that

165°F doesn't jive with other recipes you'll find which call for 180-185. At 180°, you will have successfully achieved cardboard turkey - congratulations. At 165°F, turkey is moist and succulent. A temperature of 165°F is enough (actually 160°F is enough) to kill contaminants, including salmonella. Plus, keep in mind that the internal temperature will continue to rise several degrees while the turkey is resting for the recommended 20-30 minutes before carving. A stuffed turkey, unfortunately, requires a higher thigh temperature to ensure the stuffing has reached 165°F – check this with your thermometer as well.

For larger birds (i.e. 15lbs and up), cover the entire pan with a loose tent of aluminum foil for the first 1½ hours, then remove to allow the turkey to brown. Basting the turkey is always a good idea, but limit the number of times you open and close your oven (once an hour is sufficient). Opening the oven will alter the length of cooking time. Remove turkey when cooking is completed and let stand 25 minutes to allow the juices to set.

Approximate Fresh Turkey Roasting Times @ 325°F in a Conventional Oven (every oven is different - convection ovens will reduce the time needed - use this table as a planning guide only; measure the thigh temperature 1 hour before the estimated time in the table and gauge at that point how much more time your turkey will need. Slightly increase or decrease the temperature so that your turkey is ready half-hour before serving.)

WEIGHT OF TURKEY	UNSTUFFED TURKEY	STUFFED TURKEY
6 to 8 pounds	2½ to 2¾ hours	2¾ to 3 hours
8 to 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours	3 to 3½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours	3½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours	4 to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours	4¼ to 4¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours	4¾ to 5¼ hours
24 to 30 pounds	5 to 5¼ hours	5¼ to 6¼ hours

Enjoy your feast!



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