

Countdown to Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving has a different meaning for every person sitting at the dinner table. For most, it marks the beginning of the holiday season during which food is often a focal point.

While Thanksgiving food traditions are part of what makes Thanksgiving so special, they can also be very intimidating to a cook. It takes special effort to remember everyone's favorite sides, desserts and most importantly, how to time the meal so the turkey is ready before dessert time. With a little organization, even a novice cook can prepare and enjoy a scrumptious meal.

Organization is the key to success. Here is a checklist to help plan your meal, and stick to a reasonable time line.

Up to Three Weeks Before Thanksgiving

- Decide how many people you are going to invite to your celebration, and plan your menu. You may want to ask everyone to bring their favorite dish.
- When planning a large menu, figure a half serving of each dish per person with stuffing being the exception. Prepare a full serving of stuffing for each person.
- As you prepare your menu, note which items you plan to make at home and which you will have others bring.
- Decide on your table setting. Whether you plan to use fine china or disposable pieces, now is the time to make sure you have enough of everything. Remember to check your stock of serving utensils and serving dishes so that you don't get caught at the last minute.

One Week Before Thanksgiving

- Sit down with each of your recipes and make a detailed shopping list. In addition to your recipe items, you will also need beverages, ice, paper products, and a host of other odds and ends.
- If you are preparing a frozen turkey, remember to allow time for it to thaw. This takes about 24 hours for each four or five pounds of turkey.
- Check your recipes. If any of them can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated or frozen, now is a good time to start cooking. The trick is to do as little cooking as possible on Thanksgiving Day. Oven space will be limited, so it is helpful if your side dishes can be quickly



Home Time

By **Tranda Watts**
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heated in the conventional oven, microwave oven, or cooked in the slow cooker.

- Decide where your guests are going to sit for dinner, and how you are going to serve the meal. If you plan to put everything on the table, make sure that it is large enough to accommodate trivets, hot pads and all the dishes you will use.

The Night Before Thanksgiving

- Double check to make sure you have everything you need for the meal. Stock up now if your grocery store will not be open on Thanksgiving.
- Arrange your table and buffet. If possible, set the table to avoid rush and confusion.
- If you have not already done so, finish your baking. Pies, rolls and other baked treats are best prepared no more than one day ahead if they are not going to be frozen.
- Decide what time you need to begin cooking your turkey, and set your alarm accordingly. DO NOT cook the bird overnight or for a long cooking time at a low oven temperature (250 degrees F). This method is not recommended because it is not safe. Because of the low temperature, the turkey may not reach a high enough temperature to destroy bacteria. The quality of the turkey might suffer too. During prolonged cooking, some areas would tend to become very dry. The oven needs to be at least 325 degrees F.

Thanksgiving Day

- Preheat the oven and prepare your turkey for roasting.
- Finish any last minute chores around the house in preparation for your guests.
- Thirty minutes before the turkey is ready, put the dish of stuffing in with the turkey to cook. Begin heating/cooking anything that will take more than 20 minutes.
- Right before taking the turkey out of the oven, tell your guests that dinner will be served in about 20 minutes and refill their drinks if

desired.

- When the turkey is done, remove it from the oven and allow it to sit for 20 minutes. This allows the juices to distribute throughout the bird and makes it easier to carve the bird. The oven is now available for heating dishes that cannot be heated on the stove or in the microwave.
- If you are going to carve the turkey at the table, put all of your other food dishes on the table while the turkey is sitting. If you are going to carve the turkey in the kitchen, get someone to help put things on the table while you carve.
- Now relax and enjoy the meal!
- When finished, remove all food from the table and prepare it for storage. This is also a good time to make coffee and prepare the dessert for serving.
- When the food is safely stored, you can begin the clean-up process.

These tips will allow you to spend less time in the kitchen and more time enjoying the holiday festivities with your guests.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact your local K-State Research and Extension Office or e-mail me at twatts@oznet.ksu.edu.

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