

TURKEY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

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Holiday meals, especially Thanksgiving, often go hand-in-hand with turkey. In fact, it's probably safe to say that more homes will be serving turkey during the fall and winter holidays than any other food item. Many family cooks have prepared this favorite for years with recipes and instructions that have been lovingly handed down through generations. In some homes, cooking the first turkey might even be seen as a rite of passage.

Whether you've cooked turkeys for the last 50 years or are just beginning a new tradition this year, it's a good idea to look at some of the latest safety updates as well as shopping tips.

To get the most out of your meal, keep the following points in mind when selecting a turkey. If you choose to purchase your turkey fresh, check for the sell-by date. Make sure you cook and serve within two days of this date. Inspect the package and do not purchase if it has holes or tears.

If you select a frozen turkey, or purchase your turkey in advance to freeze, allow ample time for thawing. A frozen whole turkey will keep for up to one year at 0°F. Thawing is best done in the refrigerator. Place turkey in a container to prevent juices from leaking onto other foods. You should allow 24 hours for each four to five pounds of weight. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 or 2 days before cooking.

Allow about 1 pound of fresh or frozen per person for generous portions and leftovers.

Stuffing is almost as essential as turkey at a holiday meal. The safest way to prepare stuffing is in a casserole. If you chose to stuff your turkey, combine wet and dry ingredients immediately before cooking. Do not overstuff, as the dressing will need room to expand. The stuffing should reach an internal temperature of 165° F.

To roast, place the bird breast side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan. Cover it loosely with an aluminum foil tent. Cook in a 325° F oven. Do not cook at lower temperatures! Remove the foil during the last 20 to 30 minutes for browning. Cook until the meat thermometer reads 165° F in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Allow the turkey to stand, covered with tinfoil, for about 20 minutes before carving.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES (325° F oven temperature)

Weight (lbs)	Unstuffed (hrs)	Stuffed (hrs)
4 to 6 (breasts)	1½ to 2¼	Not Applicable
6 to 8	2¼ to 3¼	Not Applicable
8 to 12	2¾ to 3	3 to 3½
12 to 14	3 to 3¾	3½ to 4
14 to 18	3¾ to 4¼	4 to 4¼
18 to 20	4¼ to 4½	4¼ to 4¾
20 to 24	4½ to 5	4¾ to 5¼

For more information, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.