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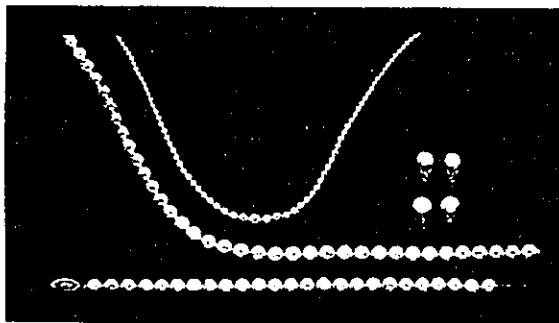
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Talking turkey

Cooking tips for holidays

Holiday cooks facing a feast will find that preparing traditional meals is easier than ever. Gone are the days of laborious planning, frequent trips to the oven and long hours of waiting, thanks to today's self-basting turkeys and alternative cooking techniques.

Swift & Co., the producers of Butterball turkeys, offer several suggestions to ensure a memorable, traditional holiday dinner.

Begin by buying a premium turkey, planning on approximately 1½ pounds per person.

Thaw the turkey in its wrapper on a tray in the refrigerator. Thawing in the refrigerator, instead of at room temperature, lowers the risk of bacterial growth and preserves the flavor quality.

Just before putting the turkey in the oven, lightly stuff it — plan on ½ cup stuffing per pound for turkeys less than 10 pounds, ¾ cup per pound for turkeys more than 10 pounds. Then, lightly brush the skin with shortening or vegetable oil to prevent cracking and promote even browning.

Roast turkey on a rack in a shallow pan in a conventional oven set at 325 degrees.

Consult the wrapper's roasting chart for approximate time. Test for doneness by placing a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, but not touching the bone. Turkey is done when the thermometer reads 180 to 185 degrees. You also can test for doneness by piercing the skin — the turkey is completely cooked if the juices run clear.

Barbecue — More and more people are enjoying the flavor of barbecued turkey. And more and more men are enjoying preparing the traditional bird by this method. Simply place the turkey on a rack over a drip pan with 25 hot coals on each of two sides. Add coals every hour. Barbecuing stuffed turkey is not recommended.

Holiday cooks baffled by the bird and various cooking techniques can receive instant answers to their meal-planning questions. Food professionals from Butterball will staff a Turkey Talk-Line to provide tips on every step, from buying to basting, cooking to carving, serving to stuffing. Cooks needing information fast can call the Talk-Line through Dec. 24, Mondays to Fridays, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST at 800-323-4848.

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