

CULINARY ADVENTURES



BRUCE KONOWALOW

Holiday foods can comfort us during these troubled times

The holiday season brings with it the most traditional and endearing American comfort foods. In these times of stress and conflict, these are foods that we rely on to bring us a sense of satisfaction.

The fall harvest brings us the great winter squashes, fruits, nuts and berries eaten in North America for hundreds of years. The ubiquitous pumpkin serves as a symbol of the Thanksgiving table. The piquant tartness of cranberries acting as an acidic counterpoint to the luxurious richness of roasted turkey with gravy is a joy to the taste buds.

Traditional favorites

Traditional American holiday foods are my favorite foods to both cook and to consume. There is a certain virtue in the straightforward nature of this annual cuisine. Some folks like to stick with the strict traditional menus featuring the bird, stuffing, gravy, yams and Brussels sprouts. Those cooks seeking the less mundane may try variations of this theme or create their own holiday foods. For instance, this year I am preparing a "tofurkey" (tofu turkey) for my vegetarian daughter.

Certainly members of different nationalities may add their own traditional ethnic dishes to the mix. There is certainly nothing wrong with a couple of large steamed lobsters and a nice oyster dressing to celebrate the holidays. Whether it is Mom's famous lasagna or beans and greens, it is all part of our American food heritage. Somehow it always tastes better when we are among our friends and family.

Thanksgiving evolved from a Puritan religious observance, which transcended into a sort of harvest festival. The first national Thanksgiving was declared by the Continental Congress in 1777 and then occurred intermittently in the ensuing years. In fact, the whole Puritan story about the settlers and the first Thanksgiving was not popularized until the middle of the 19th century.

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln declared that there be a national day of Thanksgiving. It was not an official national holiday until Franklin Roosevelt enacted a law.

Turkey dominates

Turkey may not have been the primary meat eaten during that first Thanksgiving feast, but it certainly is the dominant center of the plate item today. Ben Franklin was a big supporter of the turkey. "I wish that the bald eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country," Franklin said. "He is a bird of bad moral character. Like those men who live by sharpening and robbing, he is generally poor and very often lousy. The turkey is a much more respectable bird and withal a true original native of North America." (If it were up to Franklin, we might be eating eagle each November.)

Wild turkeys were plentiful in the states, and part of the tremendous bounty of wild game duck and shellfish. Our tradition of celebrating this holiday is really our connection to the first observance declared by the first governor of Massachusetts, who commemorated that first, horrible winter endured by settlers and probably celebrated it in the spring or summer.

It's often hard to separate fact and fiction about Thanksgiving. In any case, it is a great excuse to get the family together to share good fortune, good food and the chance to express our gratitude and humility for the bounty of our table.

Here are some traditional recipes for you to try. Don't be afraid to change them according to your

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LOOKING AHEAD

- Olive oil
- Kitchen Kapers

TURKEY TRENDS

Don't mess with this traditional roasted bird

By KEN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER
k.abramczyk@oe.homecomm.net

Go ahead. Just mess with the Thanksgiving family tradition and you're liable to alienate some relatives.

Adventurous cooks may be tempted to spice or flavor up the turkey on Thanksgiving, but odds are they will ruin in their imagination when it comes to roasting the turkey. After all, nobody wants to hear a sibling say, "We NEVER prepare a turkey like THAT!"

Traditionalists win

Chef Kevin Enright, instructor at Oakland Community College, thinks tradition generally wins out.

"It's kind of funny," Enright said. "It's a day when people really don't change their methods. People generally say, 'It's how we've always done it.' When it comes to roasting a turkey, most people just don't change what they do." Most people may change a dressing or gravy first before they change the way they cook the turkey.

In *The Dean & DeLuca Cookbook*, authors David Rosengarten with Joel Denn and Giorgio DeLuca indicate that there's little indication that Americans will ever give up their roast turkey on Thanksgiving, yet millions "grumble" about turkey's inferiority to other birds.

"Because the turkey's dark meat takes longer to cook than the turkey's white meat, most roast turkeys in the United States, we dare say, come to the table with dry, stringy white meat that has been overcooked while the chef's been waiting for the dark meat to cook."

"It's a great shame because the white meat - when cooked just past pink (at about 160°), when it still retains a great deal of juice, can be delicious indeed."

Many cooks swear by fresh turkeys, but they too need to be careful not to be too far ahead of themselves.

A common problem is that people will buy a fresh turkey so it tastes better, but will buy it too much ahead of time," says Sylvia Treisman, educator of food nutrition and food safety for the Michigan State University Extension Services. Fresh turkeys can be stored in a refrigerator for no more than two days before freezing becomes necessary, she says.

When working with a frozen turkey, planning is essential to safe preparation because proper thawing ensures thorough cooking. Thawing, which should be done on a platter in the bottom portion of the refrigerator, takes 24 hours for every five pounds of turkey, says Treisman. "The problem is many people buy their frozen turkey too late or a few days ahead of time."

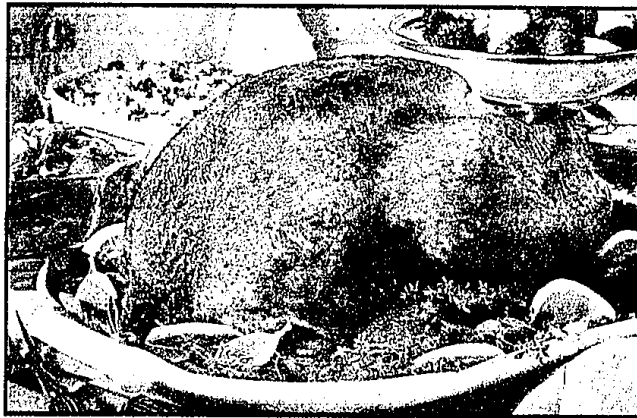
Basting time

Many cooks generally stick with the traditional butter baste every 15 minutes on the turkey, then baste with fat after the first hour of cooking. Some just leave it alone.

And then there are those who are working on their first bird. Enright has some tips that may seem obvious, but for those who don't have a clue, they will help.

"You have to make sure the packages are out of both ends," Enright said. That means a thorough check of the cavity for any loose neck or turkey parts that may be floating around, then a thorough rinse of the cavity.

"Season the inside of the cavity with chopped onions, celery, carrots and apple core or orange rinds,"



Time for tradition: Most cooks and holiday hosts do not change any of their cooking strategies on Thanksgiving Day and stick with the traditional roasted turkey they fix year after year.

Poached Pears
stuffed with cranberry chutney

- 1 lemon, remove the zest
- 1 orange, remove the zest
- 4 whole pears (Bartlett or Anjou) peel, cut in half, remove the core
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon fresh ginger, grated
- 2 sticks cinnamon
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1 cup white wine or water

Squeeze the orange and lemon. Combine all the ingredients, including the zest, except the pears. Bring to a simmer. Add the pears, cook in the syrup for about 20 minutes. Remove from the heat, let cool in the syrup. Serve the pears stuffed with the Cranberry Chutney with turkey or poultry. (See inside Taste for Cranberry Chutney and other Thanksgiving recipes.) Makes 8 servings.

Recipe courtesy of Kevin Enright, culinary arts instructor at Oakland Community College.

Enright said. "That will flavor it from the inside."

And what herbs can be used on the outside? "Most people like the standard sage, oregano or marjoram," Enright said. "Or you can use a mixture of mixed herb butter, using whole butter, fresh basil, oregano and parsley and place it between the skin and the meat of the breast. The herbs will infuse more flavors into the breast."

Larger turkeys (over 15 pounds) should be cooked 12-15 minutes a pound, and at a lower temperature at 325° F. A smaller turkey can be cooked at 350° F. To check it, put a thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh. Digital thermometers "work great," Enright said.

When the turkey is about 75 percent done, place loose foil tents on the breast and wings to prevent the skin from overbrowning. Dean and DeLuca suggest cutting up the breast and consider serving it as a first course with a light gravy and white wine, then serve the dark meat later once it is cooked with a red wine and a darker gravy as a second course. The book also suggests brining the turkey for 12 hours or so, to keep the white meat juicy.

Irma Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker recommend in their cookbook, *The Joy of Cooking*, heating the oven temperature first to 450° F, then reducing the heat to 350° F, or 325° F for large turkeys. They also recommend wrapping the bird in a coarse woven cloth, soaked in melted unsalted butter or vegetable oil, to resolve the problem of cooking moist tenderness into two different kinds of meat.

Many chefs, including Enright, do not stuff the turkey before roasting the bird, so the raw turkey does not contaminate the stuffing. "One of the things we tell people is to prepare it separately," Enright said.

If you don't want to anger the family traditionalists by changing your preparation of the turkey, then tweak the side dishes a little. Or a lot.

Enright likes a stuffing made with almonds, apples and walnuts. Want a sweet gravy? Go ahead and add cranberries to it.

"I like sweet potatoes baked with salt and pepper, but you can cook them in a maple syrup with a brown sugar glaze," Enright suggests.

The meal should include a green vegetable and green salads with perhaps a cranberry vinaigrette. Enright said. "For dessert, you can try something different, like a pumpkin cheesecake, or an apple strudel which is excellent in the fall." Poached pears or apple or pear cobbles are also nice changes of pace.

After dinner, finish carving your turkey. "It should be carved in full rather than storing the carcass in the refrigerator," Treisman said. "And it should not be left out for more than two hours before it's refrigerated. That's a common mistake. People will leave the turkey out until midnight to let people nibble."

Staff Writer Nicole Stafford contributed to this story.

Help your family reconnect during evening meals

SEASONAL SENSATIONS



DIANE REYNOLDS

The average household prepares and eats dinner at home five nights a week, despite busy schedules, according to a recent national survey.

It can be a challenge to eat at a leisurely pace during meals earlier in the day. Breakfast may be eaten in shifts as everyone races out the door. Lunch is often rushed in school cafeterias, workplaces and restaurants or while running errands.

Dinner at home offers a reprieve from this hectic pace. Plus, it allows families to reconnect, share the events of the day and savor the meal.

Enjoy a positive time

Young kids often arrive home, in their words,

"starving." While you don't want dinner appetites ruined, a light, healthy snack can curb late-afternoon crankiness. Veggies and ranch dip, pretzels with dipping mustard or a low-fat granola bar are just enough to do the trick.

Turn off the radio, TV and computer when it's time to eat. Ignore the phone and let the answering machine do its job. Even if it's a quick dinner on a night when you have to head back out for activities, allow at least 20 minutes to eat and communicate the best parts of your day.

Don't forget that children eat more slowly than adults. Take the extra few minutes while they finish and enjoy talking and sipping some after dinner wine or flavored hot tea. The dishes will wait.

Surprising benefits

Children who routinely eat meals with their families tend to have a healthier overall diet. In fact, those kids eat more fruits, vegetables and calcium-

containing foods. Less fried foods, saturated fat and soda pop is consumed compared to the children who don't often eat with the rest of the family.

That's because your child is not overweight doesn't mean he or she is healthy. Blood cholesterol levels can be at an unhealthy level at an early age, laying the foundation for poor adult heart health. Lack of plant foods (fruits, vegetables and whole grains) can lead to health problems.

Let's cook

Get the younger members of your household involved in selecting and preparing meals. Take them to the grocery store with a shopping list. The produce department is the best place to explore. Send each child to select one unfamiliar fruit or vegetable (it may be new to you, too). Check out cookbooks for preparation ideas.

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