

Extension Notes

Personal Column for November 16, 2010

By Gary Hall, ISU Regional Extension Education Director

The Ultimate Turkey Feast

You and your family might be getting ready to celebrate Thanksgiving with a turkey feast. The ultimate turkey feast depends on purchasing the right bird and cooking it to avoid ultimate sickness.

Turkeys come in many forms: frozen, frozen pre-stuffed, fresh and pre-cooked. Frozen turkeys can be bought anytime, but must be thawed two to three days before the big day to ensure proper cooking. A fresh turkey needs to be bought one or two days before cooking. Left up to me and my cooking skills, I would go for the pre-cooked turkeys. Bring them home and served within an hour or two.

When finding the right turkey, size does matter. A good rule of thumb is 1 pound per person. This way there will be some leftovers, but not too much.

For your frozen turkey you need to be organized and plan ahead. The recommended, safest thawing method is in a refrigerator set at 40 degrees or below. Plan for 24 hours in the frig for each 4 to 5 pounds of turkey. Planning ahead is going to be important because if you get a 20 pound turkey, it could take up to five days to thaw that big bird. Place the thawing turkey in a container before putting it in the refrigerator so juices drip in the container, not on other foods.

A quicker thawing method is submerging the turkey in cold water. Make sure the water stays cold and is changed every 30 minutes. This method requires about 30 minutes per pound for a whole turkey.

Another kitchen thawing tool would be your microwave. When using this modern kitchen marvel you would be well advised to have a small turkey to make sure it fits. Most importantly, anything thawed in a microwave needs to be cooked immediately.

You are now ready to prepare that ultimate turkey for cooking. Begin by removing the neck and giblets, wash the turkey inside and out with cold water and drain it well. Wash your hands, utensils, the sink and anything else that has come in contact with the raw turkey to prevent contamination or food borne illness.

Turkey should be cooked in an oven set to at least 325 degrees. Place the turkey breast side up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. Use a meat thermometer to make sure the turkey cooks to a minimum of 165 degrees in the thickest part, which could be the breast or thigh. You can cover the turkey with a loose tent of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Take off the tent after about 20 to 30 minutes before the turkey is done cooking. This should prevent burning, but may increase cooking time.

When finished cooking, let the turkey sit for 20 minutes before carving.

After your ultimate feast, remove the turkey bones and refrigerate all the leftovers in small, shallow containers. Use the leftover turkey and stuffing within three to four days and gravy within one to two days or freeze the leftovers. When you enjoy those leftovers you can feel confident that you have avoided any food borne illness. Then as you fall into a food induced stupor you can dream of all the enjoyment of the ultimate turkey feast.

#

Contact: Gary Hall, 2023 S Federal Ave, Mason City, IA 50401, 641-423-0844,
garyhall@iastate.edu