
Food Safety Facts



Food Safety
and Inspection
Service

Turkey Basics: Safe Cooking

Information for Consumers

Revised September 2003

Roasting Instructions

Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 °F. Preheating the oven is not necessary.

Place turkey on a rack in a roasting pan.

For safety and uniform doneness of the turkey, cook stuffing separately in a casserole. Use a food thermometer to check that the internal temperature of the stuffing has reached 165 °F.

If you choose to stuff a turkey, you must use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey and the stuffing. The temperature of a whole turkey must reach 180 °F in the innermost part of the thigh and the center of the stuffing must reach 165 °F. If the stuffing has not reached 165 °F, continue cooking the turkey until the stuffing reaches 165 °F.

If the turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is also recommended that a food thermometer be used to test in several places, including the innermost part of the thigh and the center of the stuffing.

When cooking only a turkey breast, the internal temperature should reach 170 °F.

Many factors can affect the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- A frozen or partially frozen turkey takes longer to cook than a completely thawed turkey.
- A turkey will cook faster in a dark roasting pan.
- The depth and size of the pan can affect heat circulation to all areas of the turkey.
- The use of a foil tent for the entire cooking time can slow cooking.
- Putting a lid on the roasting pan speeds up cooking.
- An oven cooking bag will shorten cooking time.
- A stuffed turkey will take longer to cook than an unstuffed turkey.
- Ovens may heat unevenly.
- The oven rack position can have an effect on even cooking and heat circulation.

Optional steps:

- Tuck wing tips back under shoulders of turkey.
- Add 1/2 cup water to the bottom of the pan.
- A tent of aluminum foil may be placed loosely over the turkey for the first 1 to 1 1/2 hours, then removed for browning. Or, a tent of foil may be placed over the turkey after the turkey reaches the desired golden brown.
- For quality, you may choose to let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing the stuffing and carving.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES

Time charts are based on fresh or completely thawed turkeys at a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below. Frozen or partially thawed turkeys will take longer to cook. The cooking time for a frozen turkey will take at least 50 percent longer than the time recommended for a fully thawed turkey. These cooking times are guidelines only. Use a food thermometer to determine safe doneness.

UNSTUFFED

4 to 6 lbs. breast...1 1/2 to 2 1/4 hrs.
 6 to 8 lbs. breast...2 1/4 to 3 1/4 hrs.
 8 to 12 lbs.....2 3/4 to 3 hrs.
 12 to 14 lbs.....3 to 3 3/4 hrs.
 14 to 18 lbs.....3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hrs.
 18 to 20 lbs.....4 1/4 to 4 1/2 hrs.
 20 to 24 lbs.....4 1/2 to 5 hrs.

STUFFED

8 to 12 lbs.....3 to 3 1/2 hrs.
 12 to 14 lbs.....3 1/2 to 4 hrs.
 14 to 18 lbs.....4 to 4 1/4 hrs.
 18 to 20 lbs.....4 1/4 to 4 3/4 hrs.
 20 to 24 lbs.....4 3/4 to 5 1/4 hrs.

Note: Turkeys purchased stuffed and frozen with the USDA or state mark of inspection on the packaging are safe because they have been processed under controlled conditions. These turkeys should not be thawed before cooking. Follow package directions for handling.

For further information, contact:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline:

1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

1-800-256-7072 (TTY)

E-mail: mphotonline.fsis@usda.gov

FSIS Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov