



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
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Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
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Leader Training Guide TURKEY TALK

Objectives

1. Participants will be able to identify safe methods for thawing a turkey.
2. Participants will learn how to cook a turkey.
3. Participants will learn what to do with leftover turkey.

Lesson Overview/Introduction: Food safety is important when cooking a turkey. An improperly cooked turkey could make your family sick. Food safety practices must be completely followed at each step in the process of thawing, preparing, cooking and storing turkey to avoid foodborne illness.

Lesson:

What does thawing have to do with a turkey safety? When cooking a turkey, it is very important that you follow food safety precautions to prevent sickness from foodborne illnesses. Turkeys must be kept at a safe temperature during the thawing process. There are three ways to safely thaw a turkey: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave.

Thawing a Turkey

- **The Refrigerator:**
 - This method takes the longest time yet it is the easiest and safest way. Keep the turkey in its original packaging. Ensure that the frozen turkey is in a pan large enough to contain any juices from dripping onto other foods.
 - This method requires planning ahead as it will take approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds to thaw. A 20-pound turkey will take between four and five days to completely thaw. It is safe to keep the thawed bird in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days before cooking it. A turkey that is thawed within the refrigerator may be refrozen.

- When food is left on the counter or the sink to thaw and remain in the temperature danger zone of 40°F to 140°F. -- bacteria can quickly grow.

Refrigerator Thawing Times for a whole turkey

4-12 pounds.....2-3 days
12-16 pounds.....3-4 days
16-20 pounds.....4-5 days
20-24 pounds.....5-6 days

- **Cold Water:**

- Using the cold water method to thaw is a faster way, however, some precautions are needed in order to thaw a whole turkey safely.
- Place the frozen turkey (still in its original packaging) in a clean sink. Cover the turkey completely with cold water. It takes 30 minutes per pound to completely thaw a whole turkey. A 20-pound bird will take ten hours to thaw.
- The water must also be changed every 30 minutes to be sure it is cold. If the packaging is torn, place the turkey in a leak-proof plastic bag, close completely and then place in water. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed.
- A turkey that is thawed using the cold water method should not be refrozen.

Cold Water Thawing Times

8-12 pounds.....4-6 hours
12-16 pounds.....6-8 hours
16-20 pounds.....8-10 hours
20-24 pounds.....10-12 hours

- **The Microwave:**

- A microwave is a very quick way to defrost food and most microwaves have a “defrost” setting. To thaw in the microwave, check your owner’s manual to make sure that your turkey is not too big for the

size of your microwave oven along with the minutes per pound relative to the microwave's power level.

- When thawing a turkey in the microwave, allow a defrost time of six minutes per pound, by rotating frequently, and even flipping during the process.
- The microwave will also begin to cook the item it is defrosting, therefore, **turkey thawed in the microwaved must be cooked immediately after thawing.**

Cooking a Turkey?

- Remove the original packaging from the thawed or fresh turkey.
- Remove the giblet packet from the body or neck cavity.
- If you are stuffing the turkey with meat, poultry or shellfish, prepare to cook the ingredients before stuffing the turkey to prevent the risk of foodborne illness due to bacteria that may possibly be found within the raw ingredients.
- Once the stuffing ingredients are thoroughly cooked, stuff *immediately* into the turkey before cooking.
- Place the turkey legs to a tucked position, if untucked.
- Insert an oven-safe meat thermometer into the deepest part of the thigh, without touching bone. If you are using an instant-read thermometer instead of a meat thermometer, do not keep the thermometer in the bird while it is cooking.
- Brush the skin with oil to prevent drying.
- Place the raw turkey immediately in the oven no lower than 325°F.
- Wash hands, utensils, sink and all items that has been in contact with the raw turkey. After washing, sanitize the counter, sinks and any containers or trays that have been used. To sanitize, prepare a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of warm, not hot, water. Immerse the washed items in this solution, remove, and let air dry. If you cannot immerse the item, such as the countertop, saturate the surface with the sanitizing solution and let air-dry.
- Once the turkey has fully cooked, check the internal temperature of the turkey and stuffing with a food thermometer. The two separate temperatures should read no lower than 165°F.

- Allow the cooked turkey to stand for 15 to 20 minutes before removing the stuffing and carving.

Roasting? The open pan roasting method will consistently create a juicy, tender, golden brown turkey.

- Preheat oven to no lower than 325°F.
- Place thawed or fresh turkey, breast up, on a flat rack in a shallow pan, 2 to 2½ inches deep.
- Brush or rub skin with oil to prevent drying of the skin and to enhance the golden color.
- Insert an oven-safe meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh, without touching bone.
- Place in a preheated 325 °F oven.
- When the skin is a light golden color and the turkey is about two-thirds done, shield the breast loosely with a tent of lightweight foil to prevent overcooking of the breast.
- Turkey is safely cooked when the internal temperature is at least 165 °F when checked with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature (even if the turkey has a “pop-up” indicator) in the innermost part of the thigh and wing as well as in the thickest part of the breast, without touching bone. It is perfectly safe to cook the turkey to a higher temperature for taste or texture preferences.
- Let turkey stand for 15 to 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to set.

Approximate Roasting Times for Turkey at 325 °F

Unstuffed

8-12 pounds.....	2 ¾-3 hours
12-14 pounds.....	3-3 ¾ hours
14-18 pounds.....	3 ¾-4 ¼ hours
18-20 pounds.....	4 ¼-4 ½ hours
20-24 pounds.....	4 ½-5 hours

Unstuffed

8-12 pounds.....	3 -3 ½ hours
12-14 pounds.....	3 ½ -4 hours
14-18 pounds.....	4 - 4 ½ hours
18-20 pounds.....	4 ¼-4 ¾ hours
20-24 pounds.....	4 ¾ -5 ¼ hours

Leftovers

Within two hours after cooking, carve the meat off the bones. Put leftovers in shallow containers, no more than 2 inches deep, and refrigerate or freeze. It is

best to use refrigerated leftovers within three or four days, or freeze. To freeze, wrap in freezer paper or heavy-duty foil, or put in freezer bags or freezer containers. For best quality, use frozen leftovers within three to four months.

Suggested Activities:

Thawing and Cooking Quiz

- What are three safe methods to thaw a turkey?
- The safest way to thaw a turkey is _____.
- True or False ___ If you thaw turkey with water, it should be warm water.
- True or False ___ After thawing in the microwave, a turkey must be cooked immediately.

Lesson Summary: The best way to have a successful and low-stress Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year or any time you serve turkey, is to plan ahead. Plan what to cook and in what order to ensure that you don't experience a traffic jam in the oven. Cook foods with longer cooking times first, and prep food as much as possible before the big day.

Lesson Prepared By: Christine J. Patrick, MS, Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Safety and Nutrition Educator

Lesson Review by: Faith Isreal, Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Safety and Nutrition Educator F Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Safety and Nutrition Educator Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Safety and Nutrition Educator- Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service, Food Safety and Nutrition Educator