

On Roasting a Turkey



Uncle Dan preaches that you should sear the turkey in a 450° oven and immediately turn it down to 300°. Grandma Helga maintains that it should first be trussed, then roasted at 375° the whole way through. Loony Aunt Sophie won't stop telling you that you must put the turkey in the oven at 550° for twelve minutes and then turn it off and remove the turkey 2 hours later (she should have been cut off after her third martini anyway). What's the best way to cook this cumbersome, awkwardly put-together bird? Here's our take.

Don't truss, and DEFINITELY don't stuff.

Both of these approaches inhibit airflow inside of the turkey's cavity, which is crucial to even cooking—we want (1) convection heat cooking the bird from the inside, and (2) radiant AND convection cooking from the outside. We do, however, recommend sneaking a few cloves of garlic, a shallot, a halved lemon, and some thyme inside the cavity. Steam will help these aromatics penetrate your bird, and air can still circulate inside the cavity.

Use a V-rack.

This keeps your bird elevated and away from contact with the roasting pan. More surface area means more airflow means more even cooking. This also prevents your turkey from sticking to the pan, and will result in cleaner drippings as well. Finally, when done, you can lift the rack out of the pan easily and swiftly, transferring your bird to a resting station, leaving easy access to drippings left in the pan. (It's worth mentioning that we love to line the bottom of the roasting pan with aromatics of all varieties—mirepoix, garlic, any and all herbs—as well as a couple of glugs of white wine (or bubbly from the mimosa bottle) and some water to keep your drippings from burning. The V-rack allows you the space to create this landscape.)

"Temp" your bird.

Roast at moderate heat, nail the internal temperatures, and REST. Preheat the oven to 325°. Remove your turkey from your fridge about an hour before roasting (a process we call "temp"ing)—this will bring it to room temperature and facilitate its even cooking. If you brined, fantastic—your bird is seasoned and there is NO NEED to salt it—if you didn't brine, you should have, but it's okay—season liberally and evenly with salt and black pepper.

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Dress your roasting pan as mentioned above. Drop in the V-rack and nestle your bird into its cockpit. Let the legs hang open, push any aromatics into the cavity, tuck the wings behind the neck, and swiftly stash the whole setup into the oven.

If you can position the bird so that the legs face the back of the oven, great; if not, simply rotate your bird halfway through roasting. Perfectly done breast will achieve 165° F, and legs between 165° and 170°. These temperatures rarely register simultaneously, so it makes sense to stick your thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, as that area usually takes the longest to cook. We love the digital thermometers with the probe attached to a cord so that the probe can stay buried in the thigh while the digital display hangs magnetically to your oven door.

(Inquire at the Happy Cook if you desire.)

When the bird is done, remove the pan from the oven, transfer the turkey and rack to the resting station, and address the juices in the roasting pan (gravy time). Tent the bird loosely with foil and allow to rest, away from the dogs and the now weaving and babbling Aunt Sophie, in a warmish spot, for NO LESS than 20 minutes. This is IMMENSELY important for equalization of pressure within the bird and therefore maintenance of juicy, juicy, very juicy meat.

Carve smart.

Pull the wings off first. Separate them first from the carcass at the joint, then split the drumette from the flat, and arrange on your serving platter. Here's the important part – remove the breast WHOLE by hugging the breast bone with a utility or chef's knife. Once the whole breast is removed, turn it and slice it across the grain. Shorter muscle fibers will result in more tender meat. Remove the legs by bending them backwards and popping the femur joint and using a knife to cut them from the carcass. I like to remove the thigh from the drumstick, carve the thigh meat from the bone, and put the whole drumstick on the serving platter. Befriend the guest who puts one of these on their plate, for they clearly know how to enjoy Holidays.

Make stock.

Maximize value on your turkey! Make a delicious broth and turn it into soup, use it for risotto or cook rice in it, put it in gravy for the next time you make mashed potatoes, use it to steam cauliflower. Or salt it and drink it straight up.

Make notes for next year. Believe it, you will be thankful you did!



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