

Taking On Turkey Day

Preparation Of Turkey A Day Before A Holiday Meal

BROOKINGS — Planning ahead to safely prepare and roast the turkey this holiday season will relieve some of the cooking stress associated with large meal preparation.

Dr. Joan Hegerfeld-Baker, assistant professor & SDSU Extension food safety specialist, encourages holiday cooks to refer to a colorful, easy-to-follow 13 page booklet: "Preparing Turkey Plus the Dinner Trimmings."

"It is a great resource with preparation photos, recipes and more. This can be found at iGrow.org," she said.

HOW MUCH TO BUY & HOW TO PREPARE

When purchasing a fresh or frozen turkey Hegerfeld-Baker says a good rule of thumb is to allow one pound of turkey per person. She reminds cooks that frozen turkeys require several days to thaw.

"The safest way to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator that is set at 40 degrees or below," she said. "Allow about 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds."

If the turkey is partially frozen when you are ready to roast Hegerfeld-Baker suggests placing it in water at 70 degrees or colder and change the water every 15 minutes. Or, go directly to roasting.

"Do not stuff the turkey if it is still partially frozen," she said.

Oven temperature to roast turkey should not be set lower than 325 degrees. Whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees as measured in the innermost part of the thigh with a food thermometer.

STUFFING SAFETY

For optimal safety and uniform doneness, Hegerfeld-Baker says to cook stuffing separately. However, if stuffing a turkey, it's essential to use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees.

"Even if the turkey itself has reached 165 degrees, the stuffing may not have reached a temperature high enough to destroy bacteria that may be present," Hegerfeld-Baker said.

"Stuffing can act as an insulator to conducting heat, so temperatures must be measured to take the guess work out of cooking."

If any meat, poultry or shellfish are used in the stuffing recipe, Hegerfeld-Baker said to cook them thoroughly before adding to the stuffing.

"Keep the wet and dry ingredients of the stuffing separate, mixing them together just before spooning into the turkey cavity. Stuff the cavity loosely - about 3/4 cup of stuffing per pound of bird - so it can heat more efficiently," she said. "Do not stuff poultry with cooked stuffing. And, do not stuff turkeys to be grilled, smoked, fried or microwaved."

Turkeys can be purchased pre-stuffed, but only from a USDA Inspected plant. However, they must be in frozen at time of purchase and remain frozen until they are cooked. When preparing the turkey that was stuffed at a USDA Inspected plant, do not thaw the turkey but go directly to cooking.

Hegerfeld-Baker added that the USDA recommends not purchasing retail-stuffed, uncooked turkeys from a store or restaurant.

She repeats, "Stuffing works like an insulator, therefore it is important to follow these guidelines."

TIPS FOR PREPARING AND COOKING TURKEY THE DAY BEFORE SERVING

To free up time during the day of the big meal, cooks can prepare the turkey one day before serving said Hegerfeld-Baker.

"It may be easier than preparing it the day it will be served," she said. "If you plan



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

to prepare turkey a day ahead, follow these guidelines for cooling, storing and reheating turkey."

1. Prepare and roast turkey according to food safety guidelines. After the turkey is roasted and removed from the oven, let the turkey set about 20 minutes to allow the juices to distribute throughout.

2. Wash your hands with soap and water before beginning to slice the turkey. Slice breast meat. Wings and legs may be left whole. Turkey should be placed in shallow containers (such as cake pans) to allow for faster cooling. Juices can be saved and refrigerated for making gravy.

3. Loosely cover the sliced turkey meat and place in the refrigerator while still warm. Cover tightly when completely cooled.

4. If cooking stuffing ahead of time, cook immediately when mixed, cool quickly in 2 inch depth containers, cover after cooled.

5. Turkey that is prepared for serving the next day can be eaten cold or hot. If planning to serve hot, reheat the turkey in the oven set at a temperature no lower than 325° F. The internal temperature must reach 165° F. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature.

6. Do not reheat turkey, stuffing or gravy slowly. If reheated slowly, microorganisms that survived the normal cooking process, or contamination from handling the turkey before cooling, have ample time to grow

and possibly produce toxins to make people sick. Reheating leftovers in a crockpot is not recommended.

7. Keep the turkey moist during reheating by adding a small amount of water or broth and cover. If reheating turkey in the microwave oven, cover the food and rotate it for even heating. Allow standing time. Check the internal temperature with a food thermometer to be sure it reaches 165 degrees. Using a microwave to reheat is not recommended for large amounts, and can lead to uneven heating.

8. If traveling with a precooked turkey, cooling the turkey as suggested above and use an insulated cooler with enough ice packs to keep the temperature of the turkey below 40 degrees. Reheat turkey to 165 degrees when you reach your destination.

9. Gravy made the day before should be cooled quickly by refrigerating in a shallow metal pan. Ice cubes can be added to hasten the cooling process. Transfer to a storage container after cooling. The excess water will boil off when reheating. The gravy should

be reheated to a rolling boil before serving. Once again do not use a crockpot for reheating.

LEFTOVER NOTES

After the meal is complete, either freeze or eat leftover turkey within three to four days of the day it was originally prepared. Gravy and stuffing should be eaten within one to two days of original preparation date.

Hegerfeld-Baker reminds cooks that after turkey, gravy and stuffing is removed from the oven, served or reheated, it should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours.

Consumers can also visit with food safety experts by calling one of the following two numbers: USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854); or Answer-Line, 1-888-393-6336 (South Dakota) and 1-800-854-1678 (Minnesota) Hegerfeld-Baker also encourages cooks to check out the iGrow.org publication "Preparing Turkey for a Crowd."

Preparing For Preparation: The Dos And Don'ts Of Cooking Your Holiday Feast

OMAHA, Neb. — According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in six Americans (48 million) will become ill from a food-borne illness this year. 128,000 will be hospitalized and 3,000 will die.

The holiday meal and its preparation is the centerpiece of the Thanksgiving celebration and safe food handling in the kitchen is a very important part of the holiday. To keep your friends and family safe from food poisoning there are certain steps that everyone should know:

DO ...

DO ask all kitchen helpers to wash their hands using warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.

DO keep turkey in its original wrapping, refrigerated until ready to cook.

DO defrost a frozen turkey by refrigeration or cold running water.

DO allow one day for every 4-5 pounds to defrost in the refrigerator. In a cold water bath, change the water every 30 minutes. Make sure

the water is not able to leak through the wrapping. Cook turkey immediately after thawing.

DO use a meat thermometer to check if turkey is done. The turkey should cook until the internal temperature reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165° F.

DO remove the stuffing immediately after the turkey is cooked.

DO store the turkey and stuffing separately.

DO store leftover turkey in the refrigerator and use within 3-4 days.

DO store leftover stuffing and gravy in the refrigerator and use within 1-2 days.

DON'T...

DON'T defrost a turkey at room temperature. Bacteria can multiply to unsafe numbers on outer layers before inner layers have defrosted.

DON'T leave an uncooked thawed turkey out of the refrigerator longer than 2 hours.

DON'T partially cook the turkey one day and continue roasting the next day.

DON'T rinse your turkey

before cooking. Let the cooking process take care of the bacteria and avoid the risk of cross contamination.

DON'T set your oven lower than 325° F.

DON'T prepare food if you are sick or have any nose or eye infection.

DON'T leave leftovers out on the counter longer than 2 hours.

DON'T store leftover stuffing in the turkey.

DON'T re-freeze a completely thawed uncooked turkey.

DON'T stuff turkeys as it makes it difficult for the internal temperature to reach 165° F within a safe period of time. If you must stuff your turkey, stuff it lightly before cooking and leave room for the oven to cook the interior of the turkey and stuffing.

The Nebraska Regional Poison Center offers tips on Thanksgiving safety and poison prevention as a free service to the public. For more information on food poisoning or if you just have a question — contact the Nebraska Regional Poison Center by calling toll-free at 1-800-222-1222.

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