

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

There's More Than One Way to Cook A Turkey!

Coldwater, MI. Just as a detour causes a driver to find an alternate route, circumstances can alter the chosen cooking method for a turkey. An oven may fail at an inopportune time, a power outage may occur, and more than one large food item may need cooking. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, in conjunction with the USDA, provides guidance for those who want to venture away from the conventional oven to cook their Thanksgiving bird:

Electric Roaster Oven - This tabletop appliance can serve as an extra oven for cooking a turkey or large roast. Generally, the cooking time and oven temperature setting are the same as for conventional cooking. Always check the roaster oven's use and care manual for the manufacturer's recommended temperature setting and time. Remember:

- Be sure to preheat the oven to at least 325 °F.
- Place the turkey on the roaster oven rack so the turkey is raised out of the juices that collect in the bottom of the oven liner.
- Leave the lid on the roaster to avoid slowing down the cooking process.

Grilling a Turkey - Outdoor cooking of a big bird for the holiday meal is becoming a popular cooking method. During grilling, a turkey cooks by indirect heat in an outdoor covered gas or charcoal grill. Place a pan of water beneath the grilling surface to catch the fat and juices that drip from the turkey as it cooks. Cooking is done by the hot, smoky, steamy air. When cooking a whole turkey in a covered charcoal grill, be sure the **turkey is completely thawed and do not stuff**. Smoked stuffing has an undesirable flavor and making sure that the stuffing reaches the desired temperature of 165 °F can be difficult. Remember:

- Cooking times depend on many factors: the size and shape of the turkey, the distance from the heat, temperature of the coals – if using a charcoal grill, and the temperature of the outside air.
- Estimate 15 to 18 minutes per pound if using a covered grill.

Smoking a Turkey - Most smokers are cylinder-shaped devices and use either electricity, gas, or charcoal for heat. Follow manufacturer's directions for gas or electric smokers. Charcoal smokers have two pans—one for charcoal and one for liquid. Smokers require a liquid to create the moist, hot smoke needed for cooking. When using a charcoal smoker, fill the pan for liquid with water, wine, apple juice, or the liquid you desire. Fill the charcoal pan with a good quality charcoal. Light the charcoal and place the cover on the smoker. When the smoker has reached

an internal temperature of 225 to 300 °F, quickly place the **completely thawed and unstuffed** turkey on the smoker rack and replace the cover. (Some smokers have built in temperature indicators. If yours does not, place an appliance thermometer on the smoker rack before starting your heat source.) Remember:

- Add charcoal every 1 to 2 hours, as necessary, to maintain 225 to 300 °F. Replenish the liquid as necessary.
- Heat and liquid are critical to maintaining the hot smoke that cooks the turkey.
- Be sure **not** to stoke your fire with softwood (pine, fir, cedar, or spruce) as it gives the food a turpentine flavor and coats it with a black pitch or resin.

Deep Fat Frying a Turkey - A whole turkey can be successfully cooked by the deep fat frying method provided the turkey is **not** stuffed and has been completely thawed. The turkey should be 12 pounds or less in size. There are safety concerns when working with such a large amount of oil. Select a cooking vessel large enough to completely submerge the turkey in oil without it spilling over. The oil should cover the turkey by 1 to 2 inches. To determine the amount of oil needed, do a preliminary test using water. Place the turkey in the cooking utensil and add water to cover. Then remove the turkey and measure the amount of water. This is the amount of oil needed. Remember:

- Select a safe location outdoors for deep fat frying a turkey.
- Heat the cooking oil to 350 °F.
- Slowly and carefully lower the turkey into the hot oil.
- Monitor the temperature of the oil with a thermometer constantly during cooking. Never leave the hot oil unattended.
- Allow approximately 3 to 5 minutes per pound cooking time. Remove turkey from the oil and drain oil from the cavity.
- Check the temperature of turkey with a food thermometer.
- If the turkey is not done, immediately return the turkey to the hot oil for additional cooking.
- When the turkey is done, remove it from the oil and place it on a sturdy tray lined with paper towels. The skin can be golden to dark brown to almost black.
- Let it rest about 20 minutes before carving.

Cooking Turkey in a Pressure Cooker - The availability of turkey parts such as breasts, legs, and thighs makes it possible to cook turkey in an old favorite, the pressure cooker. Used since the 1930's, a pressure cooker is a quick cooking, stove-top metal pot with a tight fitting lid bearing a dial or weighted gauge to verify the pressure. When heated, the liquid converts to steam that, under pressure, can reach as high as 240 °F—hotter than the boiling point. Remember:

- Food cooks in about a third or less time than conventional cooking methods.
- Because pressure cookers are made by various manufacturers and timing varies at altitudes above 1,000 feet, it is important to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Do not remove the lid until the pressure lowers and the pot cools! The pressure specified must be kept constant for the recommended time, and the lid must not be removed until the pressure lowers and the pot cools.

Slow Cooking a Cut-up Turkey - A cut-up turkey can be cooked in a slow cooker or "Crockpot." Cut the turkey into parts, such as breast, legs, thigh, wings, etc. Alternatively, it can be cut into quarters. The parts or quarters should always be thawed before placing them into a

slow cooker. Add turkey part(s) and desired amount of liquid. Follow the manufacturer's directions regarding the amount of liquid to add. Remember:

- Cook on the "High" setting for an hour or more.
- Then turn the cooker to "Low," if desired (or continue cooking on High).
- The appliance should maintain a temperature of between 170 and 200 °F.
- Do not remove the cover during cooking. It can take 20 to 25 minutes to regain the lost steam and temperature if the cover is removed.

Finally, regardless of how you cook your bird, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to remind you:

To cook your turkey to an internal temperature of at least 165 °F as measured by a meat thermometer!

A turkey is safely cooked when the food thermometer reaches a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast... And a safely cooked turkey is the only way to eat turkey. The health agency food staff members say "Be safe by following these guidelines and ENJOY your Thanksgiving Turkey!" For more information about how to cook a turkey, please visit our website at www.bhsj.org.

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