

Countdown to a Food Safe Thanksgiving Day - FAQs

Thanksgiving Day is just two weeks away, and it's time to get ready. Here are answers to important food safety questions so you can cook your turkey safely.

Q: How long does it take to thaw a turkey?

A: The time it takes to thaw a turkey depends on which of these three thawing methods you choose:

- **Refrigerator thaw method (recommended):** 24 hours for every five pounds.
- **Cold-water bath method:** 30 minutes per pound.
- **Microwave method:** follow instructions in the owner's manual.

The turkey should never be thawed on the counter or in hot water and must not be left at room temperature for more than two hours.

Q: Should I wash my turkey?

A: No. Washing or rinsing any meat or poultry is not recommended, and actually increases the risk you will cross-contaminate germs to other foods you're preparing.

Q: Should I stuff my turkey?

A: USDA does not recommend stuffing a turkey for food safety reasons. When stuffed, it takes a longer time to cook the turkey, and you must make sure the innermost part of the stuffing has also reached 165 degrees Fahrenheit. This can be challenging with large birds. If you choose to stuff your turkey, add 30 minutes to the times.

Q: Should I roast my turkey breast side up or down?

A: USDA recommends cooking a whole turkey breast side up if it is being roasted in the oven.



Q: How long do you cook a turkey in an oven bag?

A: Oven cooking bags are safe and can be an effective way to speed up the cooking process. For whole, unstuffed turkeys in oven cooking bags, cook at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for the following approximate times:

- 8-12 lb. turkey: 1 1/2 to 2 hours.
- 12 to 16 lb. turkey: 2 to 2 1/2 hours.
- 16-20 lb. turkey: 2 1/2 to 3 hours.
- 20-24 lb. turkey: 3 to 3 1/2 hours.

Q: How do you cook a turkey in an electric roaster oven?

A: Generally, the cooking time and oven temperature setting are the same as for conventional cooking. Always check the roaster's use and care manual for the manufacturer's recommended temperature settings. Preheat the oven to at least 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Place the turkey on the roaster oven rack or other meat rack so the turkey is raised out of the juices that collect in the bottom of the oven liner. Leave the lid on throughout cooking, removing it as little as possible to avoid slowing the cooking process.

Q: Is it safe to cook a turkey overnight at a low temperature?

A: It is not safe to cook any poultry in an oven set lower than 325 degrees Fahrenheit. At lower temperatures, poultry stays in the Danger Zone (between 40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit) for too long.

Q: When do I know my turkey or turkey breast is ready?

A: The turkey is ready when it reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh, and the innermost part of the wing. If stuffed, make sure the innermost part of the stuffing also reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit before you stop cooking the turkey.

Learn more about how to [safely select, thaw and prepare a turkey](#). For more Thanksgiving food safety tips, follow FSIS on Twitter [@USDAFoodSafety](#) or on Facebook at [Facebook.com/FoodSafety.gov](#).