

Brine or Not to Brine and Other Last Minute Turkey Tips



How to handle Thanksgiving Day turkey dilemmas.]

Flowers are on the table, wine is chilling in the fridge, and pies are cooling on the counter. In a few hours, guests will be knocking at the door. All that's left to do is pop the turkey in the oven ? what could possibly go wrong?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. We asked Whole Foods Market Global Meat Buyer Theo Weening ? a man who literally buys thousands of turkeys a year ? to talk with us about how to handle Thanksgiving Day turkey dilemmas.

I've read that some of the most common last-minute turkey questions have to do with frozen turkeys that are not fully thawed. Is that something you hear frequently?

TW: The majority of turkeys we sell at Whole Foods Market are fresh, so that's not usually a concern. They may have a thin layer of ice from being kept extremely cold, but they aren't frozen through. However, you do want the bird to be fully thawed before you put it in the oven. If the turkey feels chilly, I suggest putting it under lukewarm running water until that thin layer of ice is gone.

What if someone is hosting a large group. Is it better to roast one big turkey? Or two smaller ones?

TW: I think 16 to 18 pounds is the ideal size. If you're hosting a lot of people, that probably means a lot of kids, and kids tend to like white meat. I would suggest a medium-size turkey and an additional 7 to 8 pound turkey breast. You want to have some leftovers, and breast meat always makes great leftovers.

Calculate how many pounds of turkey you'll need with our handy holiday servings planner.



[Roast Turkey with Apples and Onions](#)

What advice do you have for cooks who are worried that their turkey will be dry?

TW: There are two keys to a juicy turkey: basting and using a meat thermometer. Because our turkeys are so fresh, they tend to cook a lot faster. I suggest checking your turkey every hour or so with a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. When it gets to 160°F, stop and let it rest. You can cover it, and then warm it up later. If it gets close, say 145°F, and you still have a few more hours before guests arrive, you can turn down the oven temp.

For more tips on cooking times, check out our timing chart.

To brine or not to brine?

TW: It's definitely juicier when you pre-brine. But you're adding a lot of seasoning, so that kind of distracts from the flavor of the meat. If you're adding seasonings that you really like, that's fine. It just depends on your tastes.

Get brining recipes and tips.



[Turkey with Extra-Crispy Skin](#)

Any other advice for turkey success?

TW: At Thanksgiving, people always come home from the store with a lot of stuff to cook. If your fridge is too full, you can store the turkey in a regular cooler with ice.

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