

A Bird of a Different Feather!

Dried out, bland turkey has become the stuff of holiday urban legends for good reason and its high time we did something about it. Turkey can be delicious once you unravel the mystery of the right way to prepare one.

Deep fried, injected, inverted, wrapped in cheese cloth, doused with Coca Cola...you name it and it's been tried. There are Cajun birds, Southwestern style, Hawaiian, Caribbean and the list goes on.

This year may we make a suggestion? "Forget the gimmicks and prepare a bird that is moist, flavorful and not cooked to a crisp." It's not really that tough when you consider basics and use common sense.

First you've got to pick out your bird. Our motto... "fresh is best!" If you've got a top quality butcher or meat market available ask them if they can special order fresh birds during the holidays. Many do offer this service and once you've tried it you won't go back!

Next..."bring on the brine!" This provides your bird some help that mother nature may have forgotten in the form of moisture. Use a very clean cooler, put in 1 gallon of hot tap water, 3 cups of sugar and 3 pounds of kosher salt (that's 6 cups of Morton's Kosher Salt). Stir until all of the crystals have dissolved and add 8 pounds of ice along with 1 gallon of veggie broth (canned is fine).

Take your "very clean" bird and submerge the rascal into the brine 8 to 12 hours making sure your temperature stays at 40 degrees F. or just below. If you keep the lid securely closed this shouldn't be a problem. If needed, add freezer packs placed in clean zip lock bags to adjust the temperature down.

Just before cooking, rinse the bird in fresh water. You'll want to get it squeaky clean inside and out before moving to the "butter rub." And I do mean rub!

Using softened *real* butter you'll want to pretend you're a masseuse on a mission. Do a great job and you'll end up with a juicy bird; it's that important.

The next critical decision has to do with stuffing and I will give you an answer in one word..."DON'T!"

Getting stuffing done in the bird requires cooking the breast past the point of "moist and tasty." Stop preparing your stuffing in the bird. It doesn't make good "cooking" sense and it risks bacterial contamination if proper internal temperatures are not reached (165 degrees F.) Stuffing adds mass which means longer cooking times. Your poor white meat doesn't stand a chance!

Our suggestion is to fill the birds cavity with fresh herbs such as rosemary, thyme, sage or "my favorite" garlic cloves. Place them inside loosely and put your stuffing in a baking dish where it belongs to be prepared "outside" the bird later.

Place your bird in a roaster with a wire rack to elevate it for all round roasting or use rolls of foil scrunched together and laid under the bird in the roaster for the same effect.

Cooking the perfect bird is done in three steps. First, you want to brown the breast. Preheat the oven to 500 degrees F. and set your timer for 25 minutes. Place your bird breast up in the oven on the lowest rack position. If you're not at "golden brown" on the breast when your timer "dings" give it another 10 minutes.

Next place foil over only the breast portion of the bird and return it to an oven set at 350 degrees F. Place a temperature probe type thermometer into the thickest part of the breast through the foil. Do yourself a favor and get one of the fancy ones that have a cable connection and are read outside the oven...this is important! Set the alarm on the probe for 161 degrees F., close the oven and DO NOT OPEN IT UNTIL THE ALARM SOUNDS!

That's right...no basting. If you open the oven the temperature drops and we're back to longer cooking times and dry white meat. An 18 pound bird should take 2 to 2 1/2 hours to hit the mark.

Finally, when the bird is done cover the whole bird loosely with foil and let it rest at least 30 minutes. You do not want to skip this step! If cut early you'll loose moisture...Bad Thing!

This technique will give you and your family a "to die for" bird that's a treat to eat and a sight to behold. Let us know how your bird turns out!

As you've probably guessed, our beverage of choice for Thanksgiving is a good wine and there are several we would recommend for traditional "Turkey Day" fare.

Here are some picks to show your wine merchant for assistance in making selections:

- German Riesling Kabinett (mildly fruity)
- Alsatian Dry Gewürztraminer

- Cru Beaujolais (Morgon, Julienas or Moulin-a-Vent)
- Australian Chardonnay (fruit forward styling)

Feel free to call us for answers to your wine questions daily at 888-288-0668. We're glad to assist you!