

How to Cook a Turkey

This beginner method is for a fresh or fully thawed, unstuffed whole turkey in a conventional 325 F oven. Cook stuffing in a separate dish.

Ingredients

- 1 fully thawed whole turkey
- 3 tablespoons olive oil or softened butter
- 1 teaspoon fine salt (omit or reduce for pre-brined birds)
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme, optional

Follow package seasoning directions when supplied.

Tools: roasting pan and rack, instant-read thermometer, carving board, foil.

How to Make It

1. Thaw on a tray in the refrigerator at 40 F or colder, allowing roughly 24 hours per 4-5 pounds. Once thawed, cook within 1-2 days. Do not thaw on the counter.
2. Heat oven to 325 F. Remove neck and giblets from both cavities. Do not wash raw poultry. Pat dry, coat with oil and season, then set breast-side up on the rack.
3. Roast uncovered; tent loosely with foil if the skin browns too fast. Start checking before the estimated finish time. Avoid repeatedly opening the oven.
4. Check the thickest breast and innermost thigh and wing without touching bone. All must reach at least 165 F before removal.
5. Rest about 20-30 minutes before carving. Save drippings for turkey gravy.

How much to buy: Allow about 1 pound raw whole turkey per person, or 1 1/2 pounds for hearty appetites and leftovers. For 8 people, about 12 pounds allows leftovers.

Roasting Time Chart At 325 F, Fully Thawed And Unstuffed

8-12 pounds: about 2 hours 45 minutes to 3 hours

12-14 pounds: about 3 hours to 3 hours 45 minutes

14-18 pounds: about 3 hours 45 minutes to 4 hours 15 minutes

18-20 pounds: about 4 hours 15 minutes to 4 hours 30 minutes

20-24 pounds: about 4 hours 30 minutes to 5 hours

Per-pound shortcut: around 13-15 minutes per pound is only a rough planning estimate for many medium birds. It is not universal; the weight-band chart and thermometer take priority. Smaller birds can take more minutes per pound.

Frozen turkey: Oven cooking from frozen is possible, but takes at least 50 percent longer. The chart above does not apply. Follow USDA's separate frozen-turkey instructions, remove giblets once loosened during cooking, and verify 165 F in all three locations. Do not deep-fry a frozen bird.

Leftovers: Carve into smaller portions and refrigerate in shallow containers within 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90 F. Use within 3-4 days.

Jane’s Note

Give yourself room for resting and carving. The timer helps you plan; the thermometer tells you when dinner is ready.

janesmithlifestyle.co/post/cooking-101-how-to-cook-a-turkey