

Hints for purchasing and preparing your holiday turkey

Buying and Thawing Holiday Turkeys

Turkeys come in all sizes to fit everyone's holiday meal plans. They can be purchased whole as in the traditional manner, or in parts, suitable for small families or those who have a preference for white or dark meat only.

Extension News



north carolina AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
By Juanita Bailey
Ext. 411 Agent

They come fresh or frozen, self-basting and prestuffed. Because so many different types of turkeys are available in the market today, you can be sure you are getting exactly what you want by carefully reading the label.

There are two important pieces of information to look for before you make your selection. An inspection mark on the label lets you know the turkey has been inspected and that it is safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled.

Some 95 percent of all turkeys — and other meat and poultry products — are inspected by the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Another symbol you will find on many packages is a USDA grade mark — usually grade A. Turkeys that are grade A are meaty, have a well developed layer of fat in the skin, and are practically free from pinfeathers, bruises, cuts, tears on the breast and legs, and broken bones.

How can you be sure of buying a tender turkey? The age category on the label is the key. The younger the turkey, the more tender and mild flavored it will be.

All turkeys in the market are young and will be labeled young turkey (usually four to six months of age).

There are also young turkeys labeled fryer-roaster turkey (usually under 16 weeks of age). The sex designation of hen or tom is optional on the label, and is an

indication of size rather than the tenderness of a turkey.

Fresh or Frozen Turkeys?

Another choice shoppers make is whether to buy a fresh or frozen turkey. There is no significant difference in quality between a fresh turkey and a frozen one; the choice is based on personal preference.

Storing Frozen Turkeys

If you are one of those people who likes to shop well in advance of when you will be serving your meal, then a frozen turkey is your best bet. At the market, look for one that is solidly frozen.

Many frozen turkeys are now available pre-basted, and some are prestuffed. By reading the label carefully, you can be sure of getting exactly what you want.

A whole frozen turkey — prestuffed or unstuffed — can be stored in your home freezer at 0 degrees Fahrenheit or below for up to one year without appreciable loss of quality. Keep a prestuffed turkey in the freezer until you are ready to cook it.

Here, too, some labels can be helpful by including "sell by" dates. The "sell by" date is the

last day the turkey should be sold by the retailer. It will maintain optimal quality and safety for 1 or 2 days after this date.

You should avoid selecting a fresh turkey that is stacked above the top of the store's refrigerator case. Remember, once you get your fresh turkey home, refrigerate it right away at 40 degrees or below, and use it within one to two days.

Your market may be able to reserve a fresh turkey for you and hold it for last-minute pickup.

Fresh turkey parts can be frozen and stored in your freezer at 0 degrees or below for up to six months. The turkey parts should be repackaged in any type of moisture-vapor-resistant wrap such as freezer paper or heavy-duty aluminum foil to prevent freezer burn and the development of an off-flavor.

Date packages before storing, and always use the oldest first. Turkey parts have a shorter freezer-life than do whole turkeys because more surface area is exposed, providing a greater opportunity for

microbial contamination during processing and packaging.

Buying the Right Size Turkey

Once you have decided on the type of turkey you want to buy, the next question is how big it should be. You can figure on one pound of turkey per person. If the turkey is prestuffed, allow one and one-quarter pounds per person. This will provide generous servings with enough left over for second day dishes.

Whether you have four days or 12 hours, you can safely thaw your frozen turkey without risking bacterial growth. Thawing your turkey in the refrigerator is the preferred method for safety reasons, but you can also thaw it in cold water.

The thing to remember about both methods is that they keep your turkey cold while thawing — the key to preventing

excessive bacterial growth.

And, no matter which method you select, cook the turkey promptly after thawing.

Thawing in the Refrigerator

The following chart shows how long it will take to thaw turkeys of various sizes in the refrigerator. Simply place the turkey in its original wrap on a tray or in a pan to catch moisture that accumulates as it thaws.

Thawing time in the refrigerator is as follows:

Whole Turkey

Eight to 12 pounds, 1 to 2 days;
12 to 16 pounds, 2 to 3 days; 16 to 20 pounds, 3 to 4 days; and 20 to 24 pounds, 4 to 5 days.

Pieces of Large Turkey

Half, quarter, half breast, 1 to 2 days.

Thawing in Cold Water

If it's the day before you plan to serve your turkey and you just remembered that it's still sitting

in the freezer, don't despair. Check the wrapping to make sure there are no tears, and simply place the bird in its unopened bag in the sink or in a large container and cover it with cold water.

If the wrapping is torn, place the turkey in another plastic bag, close securely, and then place in water. You will need to change the water frequently to assure safe but effective thawing. The National Turkey Federation recommends every 30 minutes as a rule of thumb.

The following recommendations are given for thawing a whole turkey in cold water.

Eight to 12 pounds, four to six hours; 12 to 16 pounds, six to nine hours; 16 to 20 pounds, nine to 11 hours; 20 to 24 pounds, 11 to 12 hours.

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at

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To the citizens of the First District:

The office of Senator is bigger than one man. I'm just a shadow cast by you, the citizens, but in that shadow lies a strength and a commitment to work for a better North Carolina.

When you elected me as your Senator, you did the next best thing to being there yourself. When I'm in Raleigh, you'll be there, too, in my conscience and with your best interests in my heart.

If I am your shadow, you give me shape and form. You made me Senator and your continued support and input will make me a better one.

Thank you,
Marc Basnight

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