

THANKSGIVING COUNTDOWN

AN ADVANCE PLANNING GUIDE THAT PRACTICALLY ENSURES TURKEY DAY SUCCESS

TWO WEEKS AHEAD

PLAN FOR GUESTS

Finalize your menu and the number of people attending. Take into account the number of dishes that need to be cooked and your kitchen's ability to handle them.

SECURE THE TURKEY

Place an order for a fresh turkey, or buy a frozen turkey and place it in your freezer. Don't get stuck trying to buy a turkey at the grocery store the day before Thanksgiving. Plan on one pound per person.

DELEGATE THE WORKLOAD

Look over your menu: are there dishes or desserts that could be delegated to guests? Everyone likes to feel that they are part of the event, and it will help alleviate the pressure of having to prepare everything yourself. If you plan to delegate, contact your guests at least two weeks in advance. Confirm with your guests a few days prior to ensure nothing is missed.

CREATE SHOPPING LIST

Create a pair of shopping lists: one for perishable items and one for non-perishable items. Look through your pantry and check off the ingredients you already have.

SHOP FOR NON-PERISHABLES

Staying ahead of the holiday rush is key to hosting a stress-free Thanksgiving. Take the time to pick up all of the non-perishable items that may be in short supply closer to Thanksgiving. This includes ice, dried herbs and spices, packaged stuffing, canned pumpkin, pecans and other nuts, flour, sugar, cranberries, butter, cotton kitchen twine and canned stocks for gravies and sauces.

CLEAR THE REFRIGERATOR

Refrigerator space will be at a premium – make time to clean out excess or expired food from your refrigerator in advance.

GATHER SUPPLIES

Locate your turkey roasting pan and rack along with any special silverware, linens, platters, candles or centerpieces.

ONE WEEK AHEAD

SHOP FOR HARDY PRODUCE AND DAIRY

Purchase the hardy vegetables you will need such as onions, squash, carrots and potatoes. Heavy cream and other dairy products are some of the first things to fall out of stock close to Thanksgiving, so pick up what you need ahead of time.

WASH & PREP DISHES

Wash platters and other serving dishes, along with silverware and any glassware you plan to use. Make it easy for others to help you on Thanksgiving Day by using sticky notes to identify which platters will be used for each food. Take the time now to pair the appropriate serving utensil with each serving dish and platter.

THAW TURKEY

If you purchased a frozen turkey, decide how long it will take to thaw and plan accordingly. If you plan to brine your turkey, consider when you will need your turkey to be thawed. An 8-12 lb. turkey will take approximately 3 days to thaw; 12-16 lb. turkey approximately 4 days; and a 16-20 lb. turkey approximately 5 days.



TUESDAY (BEFORE THANKSGIVING)

BAKE DESSERTS

Prepare cookies, breads, pumpkin pie or other desserts that can hold for two days.

PREPARE SAUCES & SOUPS

Ease the number of dishes you have to prepare on Thanksgiving Day by making dips, soups, cranberry sauce and salad dressing ahead of time. Besides the benefit of not having to prepare them along with same-day dishes, the flavor of most sauces, soups, dips and dressings is enhanced by resting in the refrigerator for a few days

ASSEMBLE CASSEROLES

Put together any casseroles, holding them in the refrigerator and baking them on Thanksgiving Day. Remember to remove the casseroles and let them come up to room temperature for an hour before baking.

CHECK THE TURKEY

Make sure the turkey is thawed completely if you intend to brine it.

WEDNESDAY (BEFORE THANKSGIVING)

PLAN TABLE LAYOUT

Even the largest of dining tables can quickly become crowded with many dishes. Consider setting up a separate buffet table for desserts, salads, sides and beverages. Set the main dining room table, arranging the place settings, centerpieces, glasses, and candles. Set out any trivets you may need to protect your table from hot pans or dishes. Have extra silverware and folded napkins available on the secondary buffet tables.

SHOP FOR FRAGILE PRODUCE

Purchase the last ingredients on your shopping list. This will likely include leafy greens, fresh vegetables, fruits and flowers for centerpieces.

PREPARE VEGETABLES

Wash, trim and cut fresh vegetables and greens. Dry the greens in a salad spinner before placing in an airtight container. Wrap any fresh vegetables with damp paper towels and place in plastic bags in the refrigerator.

BRINE THE TURKEY

If you're brining your turkey, prepare the brine in a large pot or cooler, and place your turkey in it to brine overnight.

FINISH DESSERTS

Finish any remaining dessert baking, such as apple or pecan pies.

PLAN COOKING TIMES

Make a list of the cooking times and order in which the dishes will be prepared.

RELAX

Sleep in on Thanksgiving because you're so well prepared.



THANKSGIVING DAY

BEFORE ROASTING TURKEY

BAKE STUFFING

Prepare and bake the stuffing in a casserole dish. Stuffing your turkey is not necessary and will only lead to longer cooking times and drier meat.

BLANCH GREENS

Blanch and shock the green vegetables for cooking later.

PREPARE MASHED POTATOES

Take care of the mashed potatoes early in the day. They reheat beautifully and can be held warm for hours.

WHILE ROASTING TURKEY

SOFTEN BUTTER

Place butter on the table so it has a chance to soften. Slice a few pats of butter and keep them in the refrigerator for guests who like their butter cold.

PREPARE SIDES

Warm any remaining foods, such as mashed potatoes, soups, casseroles and dinner rolls. Take out any cold desserts from the refrigerator, giving them ample time to come to room temperature.

AFTER REMOVING THE TURKEY FROM THE OVEN

RESERVE DRIPPINGS

Pour off any drippings from the roasting pan and reserve or add to the gravy.

REST TURKEY

Put a foil tent over the turkey and allow it to rest for 20-25 minutes before carving.

CLEANUP

Wash any extra cooking utensils, pots and pans.

PREPARE FINAL DISHES

Finish any remaining dishes and vegetable sides. Dress and toss the salad. Carve the turkey.

Enjoy your Thanksgiving dinner!

THE DAY AFTER

By preparing so many dishes and desserts ahead of time, the cleanup from the day's final preparations will be easier. Leftovers allow for endless possibilities to be crafted into new dishes that are perfect for lunch or dinner. Easy solutions like turkey soup or layered leftover casserole are great options for simple "post Black-Friday" meals.

