



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

Corporate Communication

1300 E Avenue | Fort Lee, VA 23801-1800

Tel: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 8-6105 DSN: 687-8000, Ext. 8-6105

FAX: (804) 734-8248 DSN: 687-8248

www.commissaries.com

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Contact: Kay Blakley, DeCA home economist
Tel.: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 8-6243
E-mail: kay.blakleydeca.mil

Let's talk turkey

Kay's Kitchen offers ideas for cooking your best 'bird' ever

*By Kay Blakley,
DeCA home economist*

FORT LEE, Va. – If you're the appointed turkey cook this Thanksgiving, and you're stressing to the max because you've never done it before, take comfort in knowing this: Roasting the turkey is the easiest part of the entire traditional feast. Peruse your commissary aisles for the turkey tailored to your specific needs – we've got 'em big and small and everything in between. Arm yourself with these basic guidelines and tips, and you're "good to go."

How much do you need? Plan on 1/2 to 3/4 pound per person for a regular bone-in turkey and about 1/3 pound per person for a boneless breast or turkey roast. Allow a bit more if you want plenty of leftovers.

How long does it take to thaw? Short answer – a long time! Place the frozen turkey on a tray in the refrigerator and allow five hours per pound to complete the thawing process.

Depending on size, this can take from two to five days. To speed things up a bit, remove the giblet packet and neck from inside the turkey and thaw them separately. Be sure to check both the body cavity and the neck cavity for these – sometimes they are stored in two packets.

If time is short, use the Cold Water Method for thawing, but do so carefully – spoilage bacteria can multiply rapidly at temperatures above 40 degrees. With the turkey in its original wrapper, place in a large container and cover completely with cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes and allow an hour per pound total thawing time.

How to roast? Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Remove giblet packets from inside the turkey, then rinse inside and out with cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Generously rub the body and neck cavities with salt and insert a medium onion, cut into quarters, and two or three celery sticks, with leaves. Sprinkle the skin with salt, then brush all over with melted butter or oil. Place the turkey, breast-side-up, in a shallow roasting pan and roast on the lowest oven rack until a meat thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh registers 175 to 180 degrees, and in the breast, 165 degrees. Refer to your turkey's original wrapper for approximate total roasting times, which can range from 2 3/4 to 3 hours for a small turkey to 4 1/2 to 5 hours for a large one.

Remove the turkey from the oven, tent loosely with aluminum foil and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving.

To stuff or not to stuff? If your favorite part of the Thanksgiving meal is the stuffing, then by all means get a reliable recipe and give it a try. Just be aware that food safety experts consider it a breeding ground for pathogens that can make you sick, if not done properly. For first-timers, baking a pan of dressing separately is usually easier and definitely safer.

The decision to “stuff yourself,” however, is totally up to you! From my viewpoint, it's the one day each year when it's the totally acceptable thing to do. I'll burn off those extra calories by adding some distance to my daily walk, I tell myself, but I usually have to have a nap first.

Visit http://www.commissaries.com/kays_kitchen/healthy_cooking/healthy_cooking.cfm and look for “Turkey Tips” to get specific information on how much turkey to buy, how to thaw the turkey safely and how long to cook it. Kay's Kitchen will also have a complete feast of traditional Thanksgiving recipes.

-DeCA-

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings amounting to thousands of dollars annually. For current savings figures for various groups – single member up to a family of seven – visit <http://www.commissaries.com>. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*