

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Cooperative Extension Service

224 S. Main, Suite B-10 • Sheridan, WY 82801

(307) 674-2980 • (307) 675-2988 (fax)



Turkey Talk

Thanksgiving is just around the corner and many of you are probably making plans for how you're going to spend the big day. If you're lucky this is as simple as bringing your appetite and some loose-fitting pants. For others it can be a little bit trickier: preparing a meal of this size requires a lot of hard work, planning, and preparation. As the turkey is the centerpiece of most Thanksgiving meals I would like to discuss a few 'turkey tips' to help keep your holiday safe and delicious.

Buying: Most of us are probably buying frozen turkeys at the store. For best quality these should be eaten within 6 months to a year, but they should be safe for well beyond that as long as they are kept frozen. Fresh turkeys should only be kept two days before cooking so careful planning is necessary if you are going this route. About 1 pound of turkey per person is a standard estimate; adjust slightly depending on appetite and your affinity for leftovers.

Thawing: The best way to thaw a turkey is in the refrigerator; allow ~1 day for every 5 pounds of turkey. Keeping the turkey at refrigerator temperatures while thawing ensures that it doesn't become a breeding ground for bacteria. If you haven't planned this far ahead (or your turkey doesn't completely thaw in the refrigerator) using *cold* water is your next best option. For this you will need to submerge the turkey completely in *cold* water and change the water every 30 minutes. Warm water or room-temperature thawing create a perfect environment for bacteria to take hold and multiply—greatly increasing the chances that someone will get sick.

Cooking: There are many different ways to safely cook a turkey. While oven roasting is probably the most common method you can also use an electric roaster oven, deep fat fryer, or an outdoor grill or smoker. The proper time and temperatures necessary will vary with each method, but the goal is the same: a turkey must reach 165°F to be safe to eat. Check the temperature in multiple spots—including the breast and the thickest part of the inner thigh. While the 'pop-up' indicator is a good guide it is no substitute for a properly calibrated food thermometer.

Leftovers: Try to get any leftovers into the refrigerator as quickly as possible to prevent bacterial growth; using shallow containers will help the food to cool more quickly. Any turkey, stuffing, or gravy that is left out longer than 2 hours should be thrown away. Leftovers should again be reheated to 165°F to be safe to eat.

Much of the information in this article was based upon the USDA brochure 'Let's Talk Turkey'. This great publication can be found at your local Extension office or online at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Lets_Talk_Turkey.pdf. For further questions feel free to stop by (or give us a call) at the Extension office, or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*