

Texas Agricultural Extension Service

People Helping People

PURCHASING AND USING TURKEY PRODUCTS

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Turkey is no longer just holiday fare. Innovations in marketing and merchandising have made turkeys and turkey products available every day of the year. With a home freezer you can make turkey an important part of family meal planning.

Nutrition

According to USDA figures, roasted turkey dark meat contains 30.0 percent protein, 8.3 percent fat and 203 calories per 100-gram (just under ¼ lb.) serving. Roasted light meat contains 32.9 percent protein, 3.9 percent fat and only 176 calories per 100-gram serving. So turkey is one of the highest protein, lowest calorie meats available.

Inspection and Grade

As required by law, each turkey is inspected for wholesomeness when it is slaughtered. The white, circular USDA inspection mark is located on the package, and carries the USDA designated processing plant number. This mark assures the consumer that the processing and marketing procedure was carried out under sanitary conditions.

The designation of grade is not mandatory, but a high percentage of turkeys found in the market do have a USDA grade mark. Most graded turkeys sold at retail are Grade A turkeys. Some retail firms also make Grade B turkeys available on a regular basis. A few may

package Grade C turkeys from time to time. Don't hesitate to buy a Grade B or C turkey when available. The price usually will be attractive and the factor that caused the lower grade designation (often nothing more than the loss of part of a wing or a skin tear) has nothing to do with the wholesomeness of the product.

Turkey Products and Parts

Efforts to make turkey meat available to consumers on a regular basis have resulted in many new, high-quality products. Various tasty soups, gravies and meats are found in almost every market. Frozen, boneless roasts and rolls in all light meat, all dark or in combinations, are offered in a variety of serving sizes. Many markets disjoint whole birds into the various pieces (drumsticks, thighs, wings, backs and breast portions) or offer turkey halves and quarters. Other markets may cut thighs or breast parts into small fillets for frying, braising or broiling. New further processed items include lunch meats such as bologna, pastrami and salami, all made from 100 percent turkey meat. Some markets regularly carry cured, smoked whole turkeys and turkey breasts.

Thawing

There are several ways to thaw a frozen turkey. Thawing in the refrigerator is most often recommended, although this method takes the longest time. Other methods include thawing in cold water or at room temperature. The following table shows the approximate time involved in thawing a frozen turkey with these methods.

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Pounds	Refrigerator (days)	Cool water (hours)	Room temperature (hours)
4-6	1-1½	3-4	6-8
8-12	1½-2	4-6	8-12
12-16	2-2½	6-7	12-14
16-20	2½-3	7-8	14-16
20-24	3-3½	8-10	16-18

Time required to thaw a frozen turkey using three methods.

It is possible to place a frozen turkey directly in the oven, but the cooking time will be considerably increased. If this is done, the turkey should be removed from the oven after an hour or two so that giblets and neck can be removed from the crop and body cavity. It is impractical to stuff a turkey cooked from the frozen state, but stuffing can always be prepared as a side dish.

Regardless of the method used, the turkey should be checked from time to time to determine the progress of the thawing. Cook the turkey as soon as possible after thawing. If thawing in cool water or at room temperature, place the thawed bird in the refrigerator until you are ready to begin cooking. Set the refrigerator at 40 degrees F during this holding period, and don't hold the turkey for more than one day before cooking.

Cooking

The goal of turkey cookery is to have the meat completely done but still juicy and tender. The skin should have a brownish-yellow color and be moist and tender to the touch. The consumer should pay close attention to the cooking instructions on the bag. These instructions are based on cooking tests and will give good results. In cooking, the internal meat temperature should be brought slowly to a temperature of 180 degrees F. Set the oven at 325 degrees for roasting a whole turkey, breast of turkey or turkey roast. Cooking at a higher temperature will shorten the cooking time, but will result in drier, tougher meat and dry, unsightly skin. Cooking time will vary with the size of the turkey or turkey part. The following approximate cooking times will help you in planning.

Ready-to-cook weight	Approximate cooking time
6- 8 lbs.	3 to 3½ hours
8-12 lbs.	3½ to 4½ hours
12-16 lbs.	4½ to 5½ hours
16-20 lbs.	5½ to 6½ hours
20-24 lbs.	6½ to 7 hours

Check the internal meat temperature with a meat thermometer by inserting the bulb into the thickest part of the breast or thigh muscle, being sure that it is not touching bone. Remember, the turkey is done when the internal temperature reaches 180 degrees F, even if it has not been cooked as long as the table suggests.

A properly cooked turkey will weigh about 70 percent of the ready-to-cook weight shown on the package. There will be a considerable volume of drippings which, along with the giblets, make excellent soup stocks, gravies and flavorings for dressing and other turkey dishes. The average turkey will contain about 60 percent white meat and 40 percent dark. This is a very good ratio since about two-thirds of consumers prefer white meat to dark. The turkey neck, when parboiled and spiced, is considered a delicacy by many.

Carving

Let the turkey stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before carving. This allows the juices to settle inside the meat so that less juice will escape during carving. For table carving, place the whole turkey on a large, clean cutting board or platter. Your knife should be as sharp as possible. Use a large container such as a platter, roasting pan or bowl to hold the meat as you slice it, or each individual plate may be passed up for serving. Use a smaller container to hold skin, fat, excess drippings and bones. Place the dark meat slices on one side of the platter and light slices on the other. Later on, place accumulated bones, skin fat and drippings in a cooking pot and cover with water. These parts contain much of the flavor and nutrients. Bring this mixture to a rolling boil and then cut back to a simmer for about one hour. The resulting stock may be placed in the freezer for future use.

Storing

It is a good idea to take advantage of market specials on turkeys by buying two or more, cooking them on the same day and storing the meat for future use. This system of food management has several advantages. First, most of the necessary cooking is completed in one relatively short time period. For example, two turkeys, if not too large, can be cooked in the same oven at the same time, thus saving energy as well as time. Also, once the turkey is cooked and tucked away in the freezer, you always have a tender, tasty meal at your fingertips. Another advantage is the opportunity to combine turkey meat with other ingredients such as vegetable dishes, stews and soups and freeze the prepared cooked dish just as you would the meat.

Almost any high quality material can be used for packaging turkey if it is moisture and vapor proof. The

juice stock can be put in freezer jars or containers and sealed. A good method is to package a combination of meat and stock in plastic freezer containers. In this method, about $\frac{2}{3}$ light meat and $\frac{1}{3}$ dark are put into the containers and the hot turkey broth is poured over the meat. Leave about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of space at the top for expansion. Containers should be sealed with freezer tape and labeled with the packaging date. See Extension publication B-177, *Freezing Poultry for Home Use* for more information on packaging. Preparing and storing turkey meat and broth makes meal planning easy.

Four Meals from One Turkey

A frozen turkey can be thawed, cut into parts and refrozen, if carefully done. Thaw the turkey in the refrigerator until you are just able to move the legs. Ice crystals should still be present in the meat at the thigh joints and along the back. Do not let the temperature of the meat rise above 35 degrees F. Use sanitary equipment and work rapidly to cut and rewrap turkey parts. Put the rewrapped parts back in the freezer immediately.

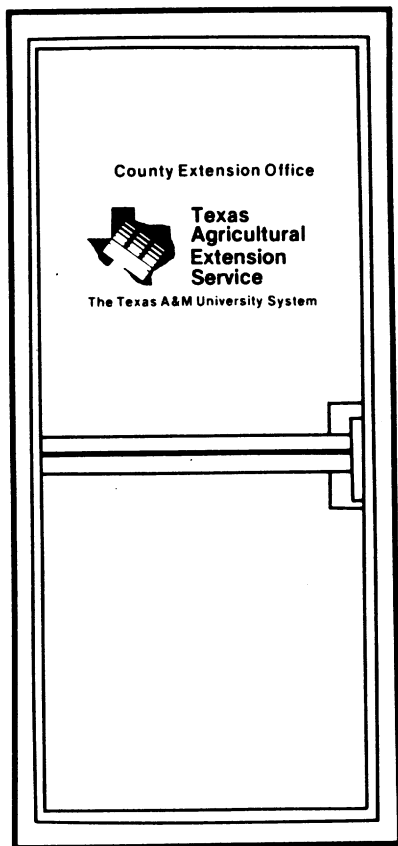
The breast portion can be used for a dinner for up to ten people. Each leg (drumstick and thigh) can be roasted with dressing to make a family dinner. The wings, back parts, neck and giblets can be used for

casseroles, soups, pot pies, turkey a la king or turkey and dumplings. The giblets and neck should be used immediately, however, so don't package these with the wings and back for refreezing. Complete instructions for this method of cutting a turkey (fresh or thawed) are given in *Freezing Poultry for Home Use*.

Turkeyburgers

Another idea is to debone meat from the breast and thigh portions. The turkey or parts should be very cold during deboning (the best time is when the turkey is almost thawed but ice crystals are still present). Then cut the meat, skin and any available fat into 1- to 2-inch chunks and put these pieces through the coarse plate of a food chopper or sausage mill. You will be surprised at the eye appeal the meat will have when prepared this way. Grinding the whole breast, all the thigh and a good quantity of skin and fat produces a mixture somewhere between dark and light meat in color. It is very tasty, loaded with nutrients and the juice will not fry away. Season this mixture any way you choose. When formed into patties, the meat is ready for frying or braising as turkeyburgers. Or make a few patties into breakfast sausage by seasoning with salt, pepper and sage. The patties also can be frozen and stored for future use. Turkeyburger is an economical, nutritious and tasty product.

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