

# Turkey-Roasting Basics

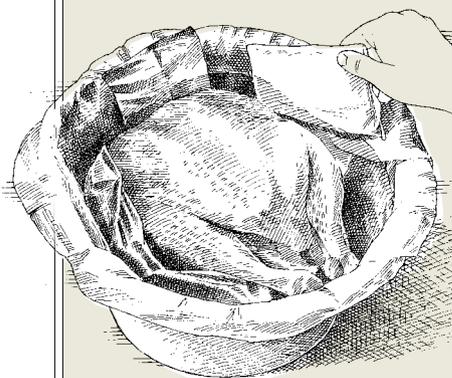
The problem with roasting turkeys of any size is that the breast is done long before the thighs, resulting in tough, dry white meat. After roasting countless turkeys, we have found two things to be most important in overcoming this problem. First, roasting the bird breast-side down for a majority of the time shields the breast meat and slows its cooking,

while exposing the thighs to the heat necessary to finish on par with the breast. Second, brining the bird before roasting supplies it with added moisture, which helps to keep the breast meat from drying out even if it does overcook slightly. Below you'll find step-by-step instructions for roasting a turkey. If you plan to roast a stuffed turkey, we recom-

mend a 12- to 15-pound bird. If you must roast a bigger bird to feed a large crowd, we suggest using an unstuffed 18- to 20-pound bird and baking the stuffing separately; large stuffed birds pose a challenge because the internal temperature of the stuffing lags behind as the breast and thigh meat overcook. BY DAWN YANAGIHARA AND KAY RENTSCHLER

## BRINING

Brining your turkey will produce a moist, well-seasoned bird. Before brining, remove the giblets, neck, and tail piece and reserve for gravy. To brine overnight, dissolve 1 cup table salt or 2 cups kosher salt in 2 gallons cold water in a large stockpot or clean bucket, submerge the bird in the solution, and refrigerate for 8 to 12 hours. If your refrigerator space is at a premium—as it is for many of us during the holidays—try using a more concentrated, and therefore quicker, brine along with some disposable frozen ice packs, as explained below.

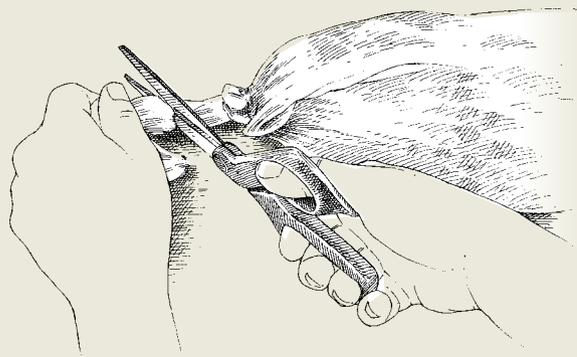


Double the amount of salt in the solution, place 4 or 5 large clean frozen ice gel packs in the brine with the turkey, tie the bag shut, cover the container, and place it in a cool spot for 4 hours. For ease of cleaning, you can line the brining vessel with a turkey-sized oven bag. After 4 hours, remove the turkey from the brine, rinse well under running water, and pat dry inside and out with paper towels.

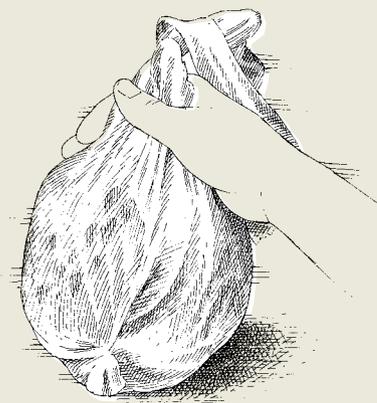
Illustration: John Burgoyne

## STUFFING AND TRUSSING

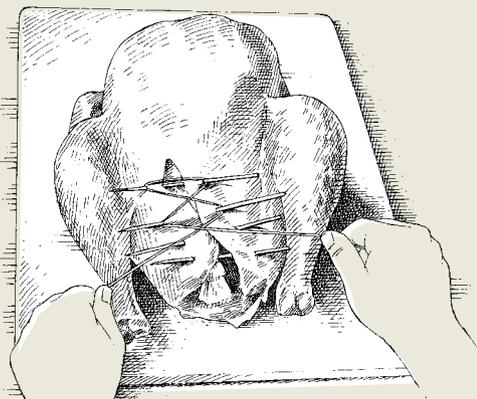
Preheating in a microwave gives the stuffing a head start on cooking so that the turkey does not overcook as it waits for the stuffing to reach the proper internal temperature of 165 degrees. Just before stuffing the turkey, heat about 6 cups stuffing in microwave-safe bowl at full power 6 to 8 minutes, until it reaches 120 to 130 degrees. A homemade cheesecloth bag makes easy work of removing the stuffing when it's time to carve the bird, and you can simply preheat the stuffing right inside the bag.



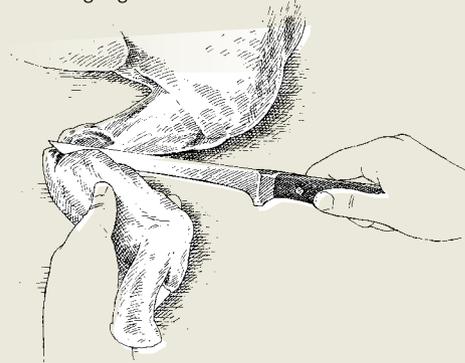
**1.** To make a stuffing bag, cut a double thickness of cheesecloth approximately 15 X 24 inches. Mound about 6 cups of stuffing into a rough 8 X 11-inch log on top of the cheesecloth. Fold long sides of cheesecloth in, overlapping them by about 1½ inches in the center of stuffing mound. Knot one end of the cheesecloth and trim the excess with scissors.



**2.** Holding the bag by the untied end of cheesecloth, lift and shake gently to compact the stuffing. Knot the end and trim excess with scissors. The bag should measure about 6 X 9 inches. Heat the stuffing bag following the directions above and fit into the body cavity, leaving one knotted end peeking out for easy removal. Wearing clean rubber gloves will make the hot stuffing bag easier to handle.



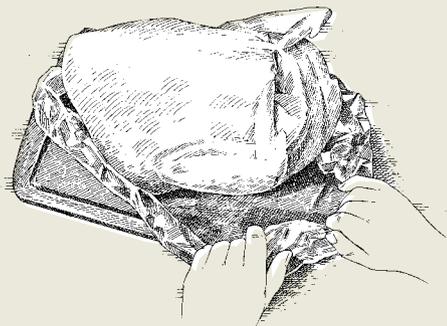
**3.** If you're not using a stuffing bag, you must close the cavity to prevent the stuffing from spilling out. A simple way to do this without a trussing needle is to snip 4 long wooden skewers into 5-inch lengths. Push the skewers through the skin on either side of the cavity. Use a 20-inch piece of heavy kitchen twine to lace the cavity shut, as if lacing a pair of boots. Trim the excess twine and tie the legs together loosely at the ankles.



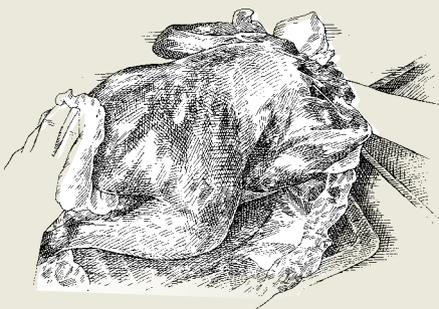
**4.** If you are roasting a large bird, we recommend removing the first 2 joints of the wing, leaving only the drumette attached. Otherwise, the wings may extend over the edge of the roasting pan and drip onto the oven floor, causing smoke. Reserve the wings for use along with the neck, tail, and giblets when making gravy.

## ROASTING

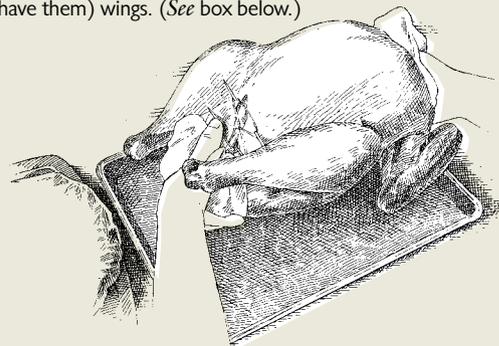
Every oven comes with a broiler pan and rack. We discovered that this simple piece of equipment makes a fine turkey-roasting pan. The flat slatted surface of the rack performs a dual function: unlike other racks, it doesn't cut into or disfigure the breast when the turkey is started breast-side down; the slats also provide drainage for the turkey drippings and protect the vegetables from surface evaporation. Coarsely chop 2 medium onions, 1 medium carrot, and 1 medium rib celery and place them in the bottom of the roasting pan along with 2 cups water. While the turkey is roasting, make a broth with the giblets, neck, tail piece, and (if you have them) wings. (See box below.)



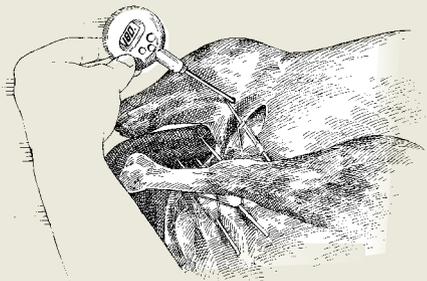
**1.** Place 2 sheets of aluminum foil, each measuring 18 x 25 inches, on top of the rack, then place the bird breast-side down. Roll and crush the edges of the foil up around the sides of the turkey to keep the breast from listing to one side. Brush the back with melted butter and roast following directions in box, below right.



**2.** When it's time to turn the turkey breast-side up, make thick wads from several sheets of paper towels, moistening them with water to keep them from sticking to the skin of the bird. Use the paper towels to support each end of the bird as you lift it out of the roasting pan, leaving the foil behind. (Use the same paper towels again when you return the bird, breast-side up, to the pan.)



**3.** With the bird out of the roasting pan, turn it breast-side up onto a rimmed sheet pan. Loosen the foil sheet and allow juices to run off into the broiler pan; discard the foil. Lift the broiler pan rack carefully and add 1/2 cup water to the pan. Using a wooden spoon, scrape to loosen the browned meat bits stuck to the pan. Replace the broiler pan rack, then transfer the turkey to the rack, breast-side up. Continue to roast, following directions in box below.



**4.** An instant-read thermometer is the best means of telling when the turkey is done. Take the internal temperature of the bird in the thickest part of the thigh; it should register 175 to 180 degrees. The stuffing should register about 165 degrees. Again, using wadded paper toweling, transfer the bird to a carving board or rimmed sheet pan, cover it loosely with foil, and let it rest 20 to 30 minutes while preparing gravy.

### Turkey-Roasting Times and Temperatures

#### Stuffed 12- to 15-Pound Turkey

Serves 10 to 12. Roast breast-side down at 400 degrees for 1 hour. Reduce oven temperature to 250 degrees and continue to roast 1 3/4 hours longer. Turn bird breast-side up, brush with 1 tablespoon melted butter. Increase oven temperature to 400 degrees and continue to roast until thigh registers 175 to 180 degrees and stuffing registers 165 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 1 to 1 1/4 hours longer.

#### Unstuffed 18- to 20-Pound Turkey

Serves 18 to 20. Roast breast side down at 250 degrees for 3 hours. Turn bird breast side up and brush with 1 1/2 tablespoons melted butter; roast 1 hour longer. With bird still in oven, increase oven temperature to 400 degrees and roast until thigh registers 175 to 180 degrees, about 1 hour longer.

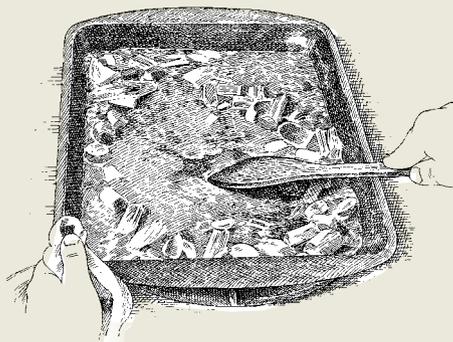
### Giblet Gravy

A broth made from the neck, tail, and giblets combined with pan drippings makes a rich, flavorful gravy. Simmer the broth while the turkey is roasting. While the turkey is resting, prepare the pan drippings following illustrations at right.

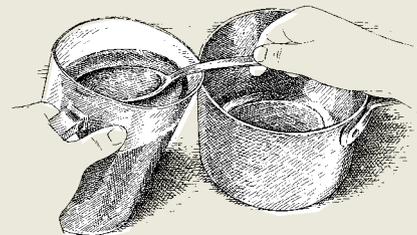
**For the broth:** Coarsely chop 2 medium onions, 1 medium carrot, and 1 medium rib celery. Place vegetables in large saucepan with giblets, neck, tail piece, 6 sprigs fresh thyme, and 1 bay leaf; cover with 8 cups water and simmer, uncovered, to make flavorful broth, about 2 hours. Strain broth into large glass measuring cup or bowl (discard solids); set aside (you should have about 4 cups broth).

**For the gravy:** In now-empty saucepan, heat 4 tablespoons reserved turkey fat over medium heat until bubbling, about 1 minute; stir in 1/4 cup all-purpose flour and cook, stirring constantly, until combined, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in defatted pan drippings and reserved broth; bring to boil, reduce heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 5 minutes. Off heat, season to taste with salt and ground black pepper. Makes about 4 cups.

### PREPARING THE DRIPPINGS FOR THE GRAVY



**1.** Remove the broiler pan rack and place the pan bottom over two burners set at medium heat. Add 1 cup dry white wine to the pan and bring the liquid to a simmer; with a wooden spoon, scrape the pan bottom to loosen browned bits.



**2.** Strain this liquid into a glass measuring cup and discard the solids in the strainer. Let the liquid settle so that the fat separates to the top; then, tilting the measuring cup, use a wide, shallow soup spoon to skim the fat off the surface. Reserve the fat for making the roux to thicken the gravy.