

A Simple Thanksgiving Dinner

I'm sure I've mentioned before that Thanksgiving skipped a generation in our family. "What does *that* mean?" I can hear you asking. Well, my mother's mother was the creator of Thanksgiving when I was growing up. Even then, I think it was my favorite holiday. My entire family, (which was fewer than 12), all gathered at my Grandmother's for the wonderful day.



However, the year my Grandmother passed away, it was in October, and frankly, my mother and I were lost on Thanksgiving without her. We worked together, making her recipes as best we could. But as we all know, Grandmother's don't write anything down...they just made food! Since that first Thanksgiving, I've taken over and my Mom brings the mashed potatoes and all is well.

In fact, this year, I was thinking about how nice and easy Thanksgiving has become and that I still make her simple recipes. So, to those just starting out or to those interested in a simple Thanksgiving, I'd like to relay the process and the recipes of that meal we all shared and how Thanksgiving doesn't have to be full of exotic dishes made out of strange ingredients. Simple is best and I promise you'll enjoy it just as much! FYI, this isn't Martha's Thanksgiving, if you know what I mean!

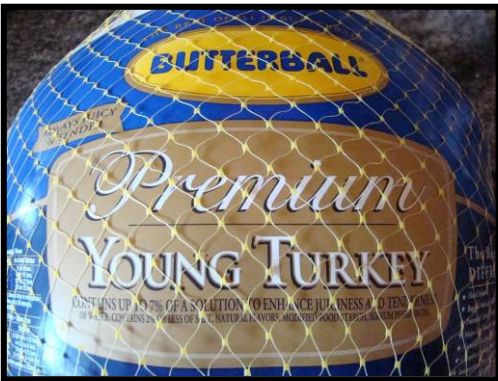
A Simple Menu

Turkey
Stuffing
Gravy
Mashed Potatoes or Sweet Potatoes
Vegetable
Cranberry Sauce
Dinner rolls
Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream

Tip:

Not all of the food on the menu needs to be homemade. I purchase the cranberry sauce from my local grocery store along with dinner rolls and a bakery made pumpkin pie. The whipped cream of choice, Redi-Whip because you can shoot it straight into your mouth!! Ahh simple pleasures!

The Thanksgiving Turkey & Stuffing



Butterball it has been, only because that is what my Grandmother used, at least since Butterball was available. This year I will stray from the Butterball to try an organic turkey and I'll let you know how that all works out for me.

So, start with a turkey. Make sure to follow the instructions for thawing. Then, on the morning of Thanksgiving, unwrap it and don't forget that there are surprises inside for you!

Giblets and necks and livers and yuk! I've been making the turkey for 30 years now and I still don't like the giblets bag.



In the process of washing the turkey inside and out, I look for feathers that didn't get removed and pluck them. I also cut off the tail that is often stuffed inside.



When the turkey is clean and patted dry, I place it in a large foil pan to await the stuffing. This is a good time to preheat the oven to 325 degrees.

Stuffing Ingredients:

½ cup diced onion
4 Tbsp. margarine
1 ½ cups diced celery
1 cup chicken bullion
30 slices of bread
1 tsp. salt
3 eggs scrambled in milk
Parsley
Poultry seasoning
1 lb. mild Italian sausage (optional)
1 ½ cups chopped walnuts



Stuffing Instructions:

1 The whole stuffing process actually begins the night before Thanksgiving for our family. The girls all convene in the kitchen and start chopping stuff up. My daughter likes to cube the bread and then she spreads it in a pan to dry out a bit overnight. My Mom and I chop up the celery, onion, and walnuts and put them in baggies in the refrigerator so cooking in the morning goes faster.



2 Fry the celery and onion in the margarine until tender but not brown. I have to say that once the aroma of the celery and onion cooking starts to permeate the house, I know that Thanksgiving is really here. Usually the parade is on while I make this and I'm basically in heaven!



3 Pour the celery and onion mixture over the cubed bread (which I put in another large foil pan to match the one the turkey is sitting in) and mix in well.



4 Add the cup of hot chicken bullion and 1 teaspoon of salt and stir. Next add the three eggs scrambled in milk and blend in well.



5 Add the parsley and poultry seasoning. Again, no measurements from Grandma so I just eyeball it. I put in more parsley for good color and flavor and just sprinkle around the poultry seasoning.



6 Chopped walnuts are next. Stir in well. For my family, I then put some of the stuffing in a casserole and bake it separately from the turkey. For other members of the family, I continue with the other half of the stuffing.



OPTIONAL: My Grandmother always put mild Italian sausage into her stuffing as you see me doing here. Cut open the casing and break it into tiny pieces and spread throughout the stuffing mixture. All my life I picked out the sausage, so now I make the stuffing the two different ways!

If you are baking your stuffing separately, place it in a casserole and bake covered for 30 to 45 minutes or until heated through. If you are stuffing the turkey, (which I do, with the sausage stuffing) follow along.

I stuff the body cavity first, keeping in mind not to pack it tight. In fact it is supposed to be pretty loosely stuffed.



Use the leftover stuffing for the neck cavity which can be pretty big itself.



To hold the stuffing in the neck cavity, I fold the neck flap over the opening, closing the stuffing inside and then bend the wings towards the back to hold the neck flap in place.



Notice I have the legs tucked into the strap of skin by the tail. This helps hold the stuffing in place here as well.

See I have placed the turkey, breast side up, on a rack in the shallow foil baking pan. You may notice I have doubled the pans for strength. Brush the bird lightly with oil so it doesn't dry out.



Insert a meat thermometer into the center of the inside thigh muscle making sure the thermometer does not touch bone.



A turkey is baked based on its weight and whether it is stuffed or not. Most turkeys come with instructions that will guide you as far as timing goes. A basic 12-16 lb. stuffed turkey takes approximately 4 to 4 1/2 hours to cook. To prevent overbrowning, cover the turkey loosely with foil once the skin reaches a golden brown, (about 2/3 through cooking). Remember though; keep your eye on that meat thermometer. Mine reads 190 degrees for poultry though I've heard 180 degrees as well. The stuffing should be between 160 and 165 degrees to be done.

When the turkey comes out, let it stand with the foil in place for 15 to 20 minutes before carving.



Make sure your carver has all the right equipment. We use an electric carving knife and the job goes quite easily.

Here are some tips for carving;

1 Hold one of the legs out from the body and cut through the skin and meat and the joint between the leg and the body and remove. Separate the thigh and drumstick by cutting through the joint. Repeat on other side.

2 To remove the breast meat, make a cut just above the wing horizontally through the breast meat toward the rib. Then, starting just to the side of the breast bone, cut along the ribs to remove an entire breast section. Move to a cutting board to cut the breast meat into slices.

While the carving is happening, my Mom starts the gravy.

Pan Gravy Ingredients:

Pan drippings from the roasted turkey

Cornstarch

Water

Salt

Pepper

1 Pour about two cups worth of pan drippings into a saucepan. Skim off the fat and start heating the pan drippings on medium.

2 In a large measuring cup add about 1 cup of warm water and about two tablespoons of cornstarch and stir together until mixed. Slowly add small amounts of this mixture to the pan drippings, stirring constantly to mix thoroughly. The pan drippings will turn opaque and slowly begin to bubble.

3 When the gravy is of the color and consistency you prefer, boil and additional minute, add salt and pepper to taste and pour into your favorite gravy boat!

So, if I take a look back at my simple Thanksgiving menu, I owe you a mashed potato recipe, a sweet potato recipe and a vegetable. Remember, the rest of the items were purchased ready to bake or ready to eat!! Just like this ready to warm up “turkey” dinner roll! Isn’t this the cutest batch of dinner rolls you’ve ever seen? The best part of this whole thing is that my husband does the Thanksgiving shopping and *HE* saw this and picked it out! I was thrilled and the kids thought it was the greatest. One negative....no one wants to be the first to break off a leg!



Anyway, on to the veggies. Since my Mother makes the mashed potatoes, I have the recipe but not the pictures to go along with it. However, I’m sure you can make these without my beautiful photography to help you along.

Holiday Mashed Potatoes

About 15 medium potatoes, peeled, cooked and hot

1 8 oz. pkg. cream cheese – room temperature

¼ cup butter or margarine

½ cup sour cream

½ cup milk

2 eggs, lightly beaten

¼ cup finely chopped onion

1 teaspoon salt

Dash pepper

- 1 In a large bowl, mash hot potatoes with mixer or by hand.
- 2 When all lumps are gone, add cream cheese in small pieces and then the butter. Beat well until the cream cheese and butter are both melted and completely mixed in. Add in the sour cream.
- 3 Add eggs and onions to the MILK and then add this to the potato mixture along with salt and pepper. Beat well until light and fluffy.
- 4 Place in a greased 9 inch round casserole and refrigerate several hours or overnight if not using immediately.
- 5 Bake in preheated 350 degree oven for 45 minutes or until lightly browned on top. Makes 8-12 servings. (Only if you eat like a bird...we always double the recipe for 8 of us so there are leftovers!!)

If you are interested in the yummiest sweet potatoes you've ever eaten, check out the Twice Baked Sweet Potatoes recipe in the vegetable section. And as for vegetables for our Simple Thanksgiving Dinner, my family prefers simply corn or steamed green beans. With all the other flavors going on, who needs anything else to overpower the gentle flavors of the turkey, stuffing and potatoes?

And besides, isn't it the people who are sitting at your table that matter the most? It's not about the buns burned on the bottom, or the cold mashed potatoes, the turkey that just won't get done or the fact that everyone is stuffed from eating all the appetizers. As long as we are with family and friends, we are the luckiest people around. But, as with most families, you better get the pumpkin pie right or you're never going to hear the end of it! Hahaha!



Have a wonderful, relaxing and Happy Thanksgiving!

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