

Ladies Have You Heard?

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Lancaster Home Economist



LET'S TALK TURKEY

If Ben Franklin had his way back in Colonial days, the turkey and not the bald eagle would now appear on the Great Seal of the United States. America gave turkey to the world but the wiry, wild creatures of Colonial days are not the same as today's meaty, plump, tender birds. With some of the biggest turkey-eating days just around the corner, it's time to "talk turkey" so here are some tips on buying.

Classes Of Turkey. There are three classes of turkeys. Size, age and sex determine the class. Age influences tenderness which in turn helps to determine the cooking method. First is the fryer-roaster, a young, immature bird, usually less than 16 weeks of age and weighing 4 to 8 pounds ready-to-cook. The meat is very tender, but generally not as much meat in relation to bone as older turkeys because the fryer-roaster is still growing. A second class is turkeys labeled young hen or young tom. They are usually under 8 months of age and range in weight from 8 pounds to over 20 pounds. A third class is fully-matured, less-tender turkeys which are rarely found in retail stores today. They are used mostly in further processed products. Retailers are more likely to class turkeys on the basis of weight rather than age.

Mark Of Quality. For assurance of quality, look for a shield-shaped U.S. Grade mark. Using the U.S. Grade as a guide, you can be sure of the kind of quality for which you are paying. Turkeys are often advertised as being "inspected"—which means the birds were examined before and after processing and the facilities are operated in a sanitary manner. It has nothing to do with quality. All graded birds are inspected but not

all inspected birds are graded. The inspection label is a round mark, the grade label is a shield-shaped mark. Inspection represents wholesomeness, grading represents quality.

Plan For Thawing Time. Plan your schedule far enough in advance to allow time for proper thawing of the turkey. There are three recommended thawing procedures so choose one that best suits your needs. One way is to puncture the original moisture-proof wrapper and thaw in the refrigerator. Allow two to four days for defrosting (about 24 hours for every 5 pounds). Another method is to place the bird, still in its original wrapper, under cold running water. Allow six to eight hours for a medium-size bird. Room-temperature thawing is recommended if proper methods are used. Leave the turkey in the original wrapper and place in a closed paper bag. The paper bag permits complete thawing with safe surface temperature. Large turkeys will require about 16 hours. DO NOT thaw frozen, pre-stuffed turkeys.

TURKEYS WITH CONVENIENCE FEATURES

Today's turkey's come with a variety of convenience features. You may already appreciate time-saving, self-basting turkeys, ready-stuffed birds and boil-in-the-bag slices with gravy. But food researchers continue to seek new ways to make cooking easier.

One new item is a turkey that cooks in its own clear bag. The package has a seam, held together by special glue, which breaks open a half-hour before the turkey is done to permit browning.

Since the package turkey cooks by the steam method, cooking time is reduced. However, the packaging prohibits stuffing the bird

and storing the giblets inside the turkey.

Another convenience item on the market is a turkey with a built-in thermometer that pops up when the turkey is fully cooked. However, these thermometers aren't entirely reliable and you should use them only as a guide.

Your holiday turkey doesn't have to be traditional. Try some of the new turkey products on the market.

THANKSGIVING DINNER—

SERVE IT SAFELY

The dining room table may seat only 6 or 8, but somehow, families find ways to stretch the food and the table space at Thanksgiving. That's part of the tradition!

Entertaining a large family gathering is fun but it needs to be done safely, too. Roast turkey—the favorite Thanksgiving entree—is a perishable food. Always thaw a frozen turkey in the refrigerator. If you must thaw it more quickly, put in a waterproof plastic bag, seal tightly, and defrost in cold water. Thawing frozen poultry at room temperature gives bacteria a chance to grow. This is especially true with large frozen turkeys because of the long time it takes them to thaw completely.

Cook turkey thoroughly, to an internal temperature of 180-190 degrees F. Never partially cook it and finish cooking later. Bacteria can survive in partially cooked poultry.

Cook turkey stuffing inside a warm turkey, cook until the meat thermometer inserted into the stuffing reaches at least 165 degrees F. Never stuff turkey the night before cooking.

Do not thaw commercially frozen stuffed poultry before baking. Put it directly into the oven.

Refrigerate turkey leftovers immediately.

Remove all stuffing; store separately.

Scalloped oysters—another holiday favorite in some households—are also highly perishable. Keep them refrigerated or frozen until just before cooking. In serving, keep them HOT (above 140 degrees F). Serve quickly; refrigerate leftovers immediately.

Can you prepare and serve the food to avoid foodborne illness? Your family may enjoy meals every day without problems, but on holidays when large groups get together, the types and larger quantities of foods present different problems. You may not have enough refrigerator space.

Bacteria can cause food poisoning. All they need to grow is the right combination of time, temperature, and moisture.

Foodborne illness can cause diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, and other unpleasant symptoms which can last several hours or even days. With young children and elderly people, the results can be more severe. Often, people mistake foodborne illness for simple "bug" or virus. The real cause may be food that was not properly handled, prepared, or served. This can be prevented.

Can perishable foods such as cream pies, seafoods, and dishes made with eggs, fish, meat, and poultry be kept COLD (below 40 degrees F)?

Do not let these foods stand at room temperature more than two hours.

Can perishable foods such as seafood, poultry, and cooked meats be kept HOT (above 140 degrees F)? Bacteria grow best in lukewarm foods. Never let these foods stand at room temperature more than two hours.

Holiday meals are fun but need careful planning. How many people can you safely serve? And, how much time will it take to prepare the food? Don't try to feed more people than you can handle.

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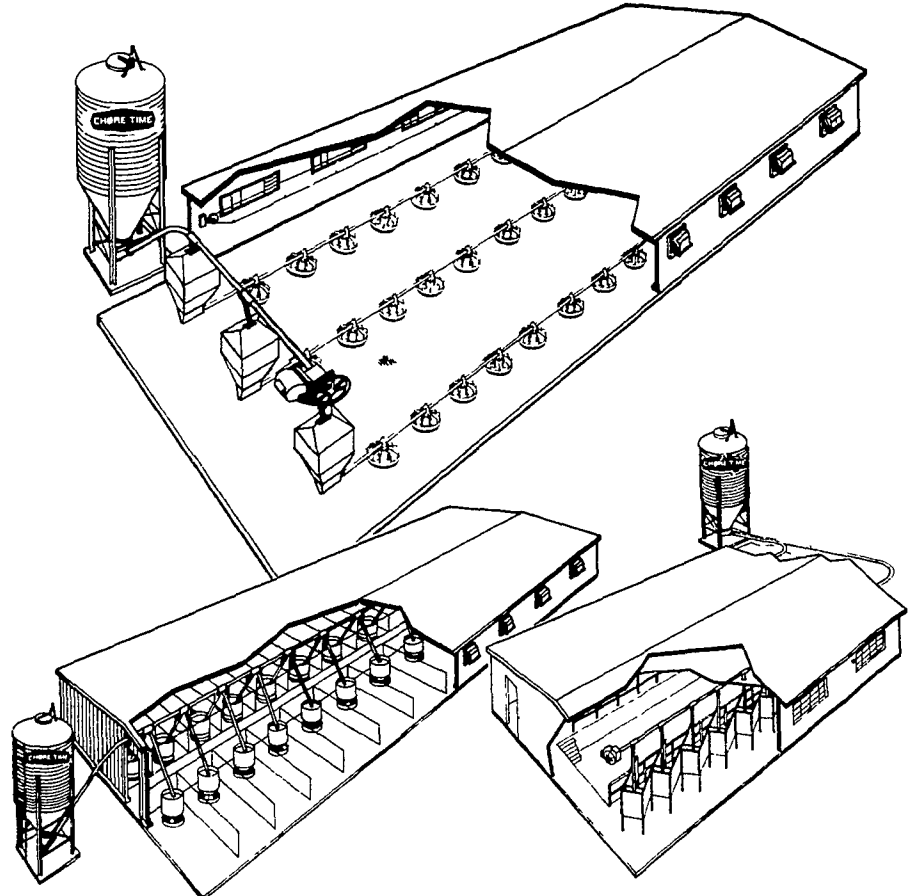
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