

MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

If you're planning to entertain for Thanksgiving dinner, think about how your microwave oven can help.

Preparing cranberry sauce or a dessert -- like the Cran-Apple Cheese Pie (below) -- can be done several days ahead. Microwaving frozen vegetables or reheating a traditional sweet-potato or squash casserole are just two ways your microwave can help on the big day.

Cook your favorite cranberry sauce in a large container to prevent boil-overs. A two-quart measure or deep bowl is the right size for a 12-ounce package of fresh or frozen cranberries. Use slightly less liquid than you would conventionally. Cover during the first part of cooking to help cranberries soften and "pop" quickly. If you see the chance of a boil-over, stir and then reduce microwave power to Medium. Microwave about 15 minutes on High power.

Normally it's most efficient to microwave no more than about eight servings of vegetables. But when it comes to making a big dinner where the oven and burners are full, your microwave is convenient.

Cook frozen vegetables or heat already-cooked sweet-potato or squash combinations in a deep microwave-safe casserole (with no metal trim) that can go right to the table for serving. Cover tightly, microwave on High power and stir often.

For frozen vegetables -- like peas or corn -- allow about three to four minutes per cup of vegetables. To heat a cooked sweet-potato or squash casserole straight from the refrigerator, allow about 10 to 15 minutes for each six to eight servings. To speed cooking or heating, let vegetables sit at room temperature for about 30 minutes before microwaving.

But what about the turkey? If

you're cooking for more than eight people, it's best to roast the turkey in your conventional oven. The preferred method of home economists at the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line is to use an uncovered pan and roast turkey at 325° F. To test for doneness, they recommend using a meat thermometer and a touch-and-look test. When done, the internal temperature in thighs is 180° to 185° F; center of stuffing is 160° to 165° F; thigh and drumstick meat feels soft; and when thigh is pierced, juices are clear, not pink.

For the ninth year Butterball Turkey Talk-Line will be ready to answer any and all of your turkey-preparation questions during November and December. Call 1-800-323-4848 with your questions. You can also request Butterball's 15-page recipe leaflet (with cents-off coupons), "Butterball Welcomes the Family Home: A Sampling of Award Winning Recipes."

Talk-Line dates and times are: Oct. 30 through Nov. 22, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Nov. 18 through 19, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 23, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Nov. 24 through Dec. 22, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Times are all Central Standard Time.

The free 15-page Butterball booklet includes detailed microwave cooking instructions for boneless and bone-in breast of turkey and boneless and whole turkey up to 12 pounds. There also are roasting and grilling directions, thawing guides, and gravy-and soup-making directions, plus 11 other recipes. For a free copy, call the Turkey Talk-Line number, 1-800-323-4848, or send a postcard with your name and address to: "Butterball Booklet," Swift-Eckrich, Inc., P.O. Box 9634, Clinton, IA 52736.

The following recipes are from

"Butterball Welcomes the Family Home: A Sampling of Award Winning Recipes." I adapted the pie recipe to the microwave. The range-top version called for stirring in cornstarch and some cold water after the fruit was tender. I knew that extra step was unnecessary in the microwave. With a tight cover to soften fruit and heat the liquid all at once, the pie filling cooks to a perfect consistency with no scorching and only occasional stirring.

The microwave version of Cranberry Compote is as it appears in the booklet (which also includes the conventional version). This is not a traditional cranberry sauce, but it's delicious. If you have adventuresome diners, you may want to try it for Thanksgiving dinner. Otherwise, the flavors are wonderful with leftover sliced turkey.

Cran-Apple Cheese Pie
1 package (12 ounces) fresh or frozen cranberries
2 cups chopped apples
1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
1/2 cup water
3 tablespoons cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup chopped walnuts
1 package (8 ounces) light cream cheese
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
9-inch baked or microwaved pie shell

Combine cranberries, apples, 1/4 cups sugar, water, cornstarch and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon in microwave-safe 2-quart measure or deep casserole. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 8 to 9 minutes, stirring after each 3 minutes, or until boiling and thick (most cranberries should be "popped"). Stir in walnuts, mixing well. Cool to room temperature.

Meanwhile, place cream cheese in microwave-safe medium bowl. Microwave (High) 30 to 45 seconds. Stir well to soften; beat in 1/4 cup sugar and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon until smooth. Spread on bottom of baked pie shell. Chill. Spoon cranberry mixture over cream cheese. Chill several hours or overnight. Makes 8 servings.

Each serving: 389 calories, 5g protein, 16g fat, 61g carbohydrate, 264mg sodium, 15mg cholesterol.

Cranberry Compote for Butterball Turkey
1 tablespoon margarine or butter
2 tablespoons chopped onion
1 cup fresh or frozen

cranberries
1/4 cup chopped apples
1/4 cup packed brown sugar
1/2 cup apple juice
1/4 cup raisins
1/4 cup orange segments
1 teaspoon shredded orange peel
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
Hot sliced turkey

Place margarine and onions in microwave-safe 1-quart measure. Microwave (High) 2 minutes, stirring once, or until onion is soft. Add cranberries, apples, sugar and apple juice. Cover with vented plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 3 to 3 1/2 minutes, stirring once, or until fruit is soft. Stir in raisins, orange, orange peel and cinnamon. Let stand 1 to 2 hours or cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve over sliced turkey. Makes 2 cups sauce.

Each 2-tablespoon serving -

without turkey: 35 calories, 0 protein, 1g fat, 8g carbohydrate, 11mg sodium, 2mg cholesterol.

Questions for Joyce?

Do you have a question about microwave cooking? Send it to Microwave Minutes, % Extra Newspaper Features, P.O. Box 6118, Rochester, MN 55903. Please include a self-addressed, stamped, business-size envelope.

Recipes in this column are tested in 600- and 650-watt microwave ovens. With an oven of different wattage output, timings may need slight adjustment.

Joyce Battcher is an independent home economist microwave specialist. She is author of "Microwave Family Favorites" and editor of "A Batch of Ideas" newsletter.

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Serving A Holiday Turkey

1. Examine the small end of the breast next to the legs. It should be well rounded rather than coming to a point. The meat should protrude above the breast bone.

2. Feel the legs through the package. They should bulge out so that you do not feel the bones.

3. Choose the right size turkey for your needs. Figure approximately a pound and a half per person if you expect to have leftovers for additional meals.

4. Brand name should be a minor consideration compared to the amount of cooked meat potential.

But selecting a turkey is only the first step in preparing a successful -- and safe -- holiday dinner.

"Proper storage, thawing and cooking are essential," says Dr. Mark A. Kantor, a nutrition specialist with the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.

Kantor recommends thawing a frozen turkey in the refrigerator, which takes one to five days, depending on the size of the bird.

If you're in a hurry, you can thaw your turkey in 4 to 12 hours in a sink or container of cold water. Just place the turkey in its unopened bag in the sink and cover it with water. If the bag is torn, place the bird in another plastic bag. Change the water every 30 minutes to ensure safe but effective thawing.

You can also thaw a turkey in the microwave, provided it fits.

Follow the manufacturer's directions to determine the appropriate time and power level.

Never let your turkey sit out on a table or counter to thaw. Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly at room temperature; by the time the center of the turkey has thawed, the outer meat may be unsafe to eat.

Don't stuff your turkey until you're ready to cook it, and be sure to wash your hands before preparing the stuffing, Kantor advises. Because it takes longer for a stuffed turkey to cook, you may wish to cook your stuffing separately in a greased, covered casserole during the last hour the bird roasts.

Cook your turkey in an oven preheated to 325° F. The time needed ranges from 2 1/4 - 3 1/4 hours for an unstuffed 6- to 8-lb. bird, to 7-8 1/2 hours for a stuffed turkey weighing between 24 and 28 pounds. Many brands come with built-in timers that pop up when the turkey is done, but you may wish to double-check with a good meat thermometer. Readings of 185° F in the thigh and 170° F in the breast indicate that the turkey is completely cooked.

Let the roasted turkey stand 15 minutes, covered loosely with aluminum foil, prior to slicing; this will make the meat juicier and easier to carve. Always use a meat fork to hold the turkey; never use your hands.

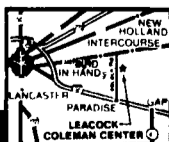
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