

Consuming Thoughts

by

Fay Strickler

Penn State Extension
Home Economist for
Berks Co.



This week's column is in a question and answer format and includes some of the most frequent questions that consumers ask about turkey preparation and cooking.

Is stuffing a turkey the night before a good time saver?

Some people may think it's a time saver, but it's a unsafe food handling procedure. Harm-

ful bacteria can multiply in the stuffing and cause food poisoning even when the stuffed bird is refrigerated. The cavity of the bird actually insulates the stuffing from the cold temperatures of the refrigerator and acts as an incubator for harmful bacteria. So, always stuff turkey right before it goes in the oven.

The ingredients for the stuffing

can be prepared and refrigerated separately the night before. Then mix your stuffing. Stuff the turkey and cook immediately. Another option is to mix and pop the stuffing into the oven in a casserole dish during the last hour or so the turkey is baking.

Is it safe to cook a turkey in a brown grocery bag.

The glue and ink on brown bags were never intended for use as cooking materials and may give off harmful fumes. Also, brown bags are usually made from recycled materials and are not sanitary. To cook your turkey safely in a bag, use a commercial oven bag.

The bags are time savers too, particularly if you're roasting a large bird.

If one turkey takes 3 hours to cook will it take 6 hours to cook two turkeys?

Cooking two turkeys of about the same weight does not double the roasting time. In fact, cooking two takes no longer than if there were only one bird in the oven.

Just make sure there is sufficient oven space for both turkeys so the heat can circulate properly, and check each one separately for doneness. When the birds are done, a meat thermometer, placed in

the meatiest part of the thigh, should register 180F. When you poke the turkey with a fork, the juices should run clear.

If you're microwaving turkey, however, cooking time is based on the combined weight of the turkey pieces. It takes longer to microwave several pieces.

Again, use a meat thermometer to determine when the pieces are done. After standing covered outside the microwave for 10 to 15 minutes, turkey breasts should reach 170 F., thighs and drumsticks, 180F.

Is price the best indicator of quality for purchasing a turkey?

All turkeys in the market are young (usually 4 to 6 months of age) and therefore tender. While stores price turkeys low to attract shoppers, that is no indication of quality.

Look for a USDA or state inspection mark that indicates the turkey is safe and wholesome. Personal preference and storage space usually dictate whether you buy fresh or frozen, pre-basted or unbasted.

Pre-basted birds may contain vegetable oil, broth and spices added to give flavor and keep the birds moist. USDA Grade A, the highest quality grade, means a bird is well shaped and free of pinfeathers, cuts and bruises.

For a complimentary copy of Turkey Basics contact your local Extension Office or contact my office at: Turkey Basics, 1238 County Welfare Road, PO Box 520, Leesport, PA 19533-0520.

Family Living Premium Lists Available For 2004 Farm Show

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Each year, more than 1,500 entries have competed for prizes in the Pennsylvania Farm Show's Family Living Department.

Since the department was moved to a larger area in the Main Exhibition Area last year, more entries are being sought for the 2004 Pennsylvania Farm Show, Jan. 10-17. They must be delivered to the Farm Show building by Thursday, Jan. 8.

To encourage more entries, a special supplement, the "Family Living Premium List," has been compiled listing all areas of competition.

The areas includes: Canned Foods, Dried Fruits and Vegetables, Baked Products, Clothing, Crafts, 4-H and other youth categories, and special baking contests.

New to the craft area this year is a Quilt Block Contest sponsored by Kitchen Craft with prize monies of \$50 for first place down to \$10 for fifth place.

The quilt blocks will become the property of the Farm Show and will be assembled into quilts, wall hangings, pillows, etc. They will be sold at auction with proceeds going to the Farm Show Scholarship Foundation.

To receive a Family Living Premium List, contact Darlene Dreuschel, Pennsylvania Farm Show, 2301 N. Cameron St., Harrisburg, PA 17110;

call (717) 787-2905; email: farmshow.state.pa.us; or call toll-free 888-385-4471.

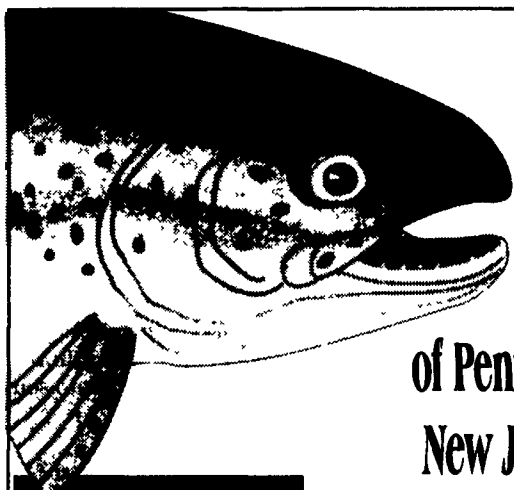
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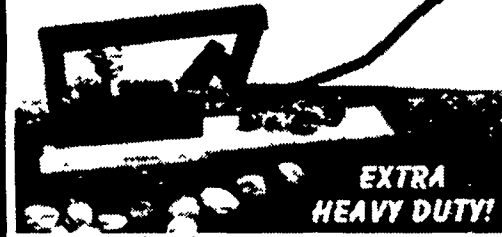
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