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How To

6 Fixes for Thanksgiving Dinner Dilemmas

Nov 27, 2013 / By [Frugal Foodie](#) / [Comments](#) ↗

Thanksgiving is a high-stakes meal.

Think about it. The whole holiday revolves around the meal.

Your centerpiece item, the turkey, hogs the oven space for most of the day, forcing you to juggle both timing and method of the rest of the meal (some dishes on the stovetop, others baked ahead of time).

Plus, your entire family is there to witness any missteps.

No wonder nearly half of Americans said Thanksgiving is the most stressful holiday meal to prepare, according to a recent Pillsbury survey.

Dilemma: Unexpected guests

Unless you've planned for that possibility, there might not be enough food.

"When buying food, factor in enough for at least five more people than you expect, more if your family and friends are the type to drop by without notice," says registered dietitian Rebekah Langford.

Worst-case scenario, you'll have extra leftovers.

If you haven't planned ahead, whip up extra sides from whatever you have on hand—and consider plating food instead of letting guests serve themselves, to ensure

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everyone gets a taste of key dishes.

Dilemma: There's no room in the oven

Take advantage of the recommended 20-30 minutes of resting time for the turkey between its exit from the oven and cutting it.

That's enough time to bake rolls, and prepare one or two other baked dishes—provided you can pay enough attention that they won't burn.

Use the stovetop for what you can, and consider adding in the slow cooker to cook dishes like stuffing, or keep warm mashed potatoes.

Next year, plan to make ahead what items you can, including pies and casseroles.

Dilemma: Missing side dishes

It's nice when guests offer to bring a side or desert, but sometimes they don't follow through, says relationship expert April Masini of AskApril.com.

Don't stress, it's OK to break tradition and serve whatever you have on hand or can easily pull together.

"If you have ice cream in the freezer, pull it out and explain, without pointing fingers, that your pie fairies didn't show up this year," she said. "It's not the same, but sometimes you have to improvise and laugh about it later."

Dilemma: Lackluster gravy

If the problem is lumps, whirl the gravy in the blender or let it drain through a sieve. That will get rid of larger lumps.

Lacking flavor? Consider adding some turkey or chicken stock, a splash of sherry, or some extra spice.

Dilemma: Still-frozen turkey

"Depending on the size of your turkey, you might need as little as 6 hours or as many as 12 hours to properly defrost it," says Langford.

To speed things up, Butterball recommends submerging the still-packaged turkey in cold water in the sink, allowing 30 minutes per pound. Change the water every 30 minutes, to keep the turkey cold.

Another trick: Break down the turkey.

"Wings, drumsticks, thighs and breasts are all cut up, making thawing much faster," she says.

It won't look as pretty, but the parts will cook faster and retain more moisture, too.

Dilemma: Questionably cooked turkey

Not sure if the turkey is done? Use a thermometer to be safe.

If fully cooked, the turkey should reach 170 degrees in the breast and 180 degrees in the thigh, reports Butterball. Stuffing should reach 165 degrees.

To avoid confusion, check beforehand to make sure your thermometer is reading accurately.

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