

Rick Osborne's 'Best Way' To Cook A Turkey

In the past I've spent loads of money on special free-range fresh turkeys and specially prepared or injected turkeys in order to make the perfect bird. It didn't make a notable difference. I now realize it was not the turkey itself but what I was doing with it that was to blame. The first time I combined the cooking secrets below I was using an ordinary, frozen, on sale turkey. It turned out to be the best turkey I've ever had.

Below you'll find 'Tips' and 'Secrets'. Some of the tips are optional—except the ones that are about safe food preparation of course—however, if you want the same results as I get, **the 'Secrets' are essential.**

This looks like a long recipe, it's not, I just like to explain things thoroughly. **The prep time shouldn't take more than 30 – 40 minutes from the time the turkey is thawed.** So with cooking time—depending on the size of turkey and if you're making gravy—allow about 5 to 7 hours from thawed turkey to served turkey.

***TIP - Timing your dinner:** since this recipe will monopolize your oven until the turkey is done and calls for you to NOT stuff the bird or open the oven, it's a good idea to have the stuffing—or any other dish that requires baking—ready to go in the oven as soon as you take the turkey out.*

SECRET #1

Invest in a DIGITAL thermometer. They are relatively inexpensive and the digital reader sits outside of the oven. The thermometer allows you to know when your turkey is perfectly cooked and allows you to keep track of your bird without opening the oven. Both of these details are hugely important so if you're about to start and you don't have one, stop and send someone out to the store. (Remember the batteries!)

You'll need:

- A digital thermometer
- A Turkey roasting pan (preferably one with a lift-out rack)
- A Turkey
- Olive oil
- ¼ cup of butter
- 1 tsp of fresh thyme leaves
- 1 tsp of fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 or 3 fresh thyme branches (optional)
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- Part of a bunch of fresh parsley (optional)
- Salt & Pepper
- (Optional – if you're making gravy: mushrooms, onions, fresh whole garlic cloves, broccoli and cauliflower – about 4 cups mixed, fresh and cut.)

Preheat your oven to 450 degrees. Don't gasp, I'll explain later. :)

Soften a quarter of a pound of butter.

If you're planning on making gravy from the drippings, then prepare and cut up some cauliflower, broccoli and onions in large chunks and add whole garlic cloves and mushrooms. Don't put any parts of the vegetables that you don't want to eat into the roaster because you're going to use the veggies in your gravy. Note - if you want to try different veggies, stay away from using carrots or turnips. Their flavor is too heavy.

It's important that you prepare ahead (roaster, ingredients, surfaces etc) so that you keep the time between removing the turkey from the fridge and the oven as short as possible (for food safety reasons).

***TIP - If your turkey is frozen, carefully follow the directions on the turkey's packaging for thawing.** Starting before the turkey is properly thawed will affect the end result. For the sake of food safety, do not remove or puncture the bag until you are ready to prepare the turkey for cooking.*

SECRET #2

Do not stuff your turkey. Follow your stuffing recipe for cooking it separately. Cooking a stuffed turkey—for food safety sake—requires you to overcook it which will dry parts of it out; never a good idea. Also, cooking the stuffing on its own in the oven gives you a chance to wonderfully brown it.

TIP - When you're ready to start preparing your bird, take the turkey out of the packaging and check both ends of the bird's cavities. Remove the neck and the giblets. Either throw them away or use them for gravy or for soup recipes.

Rinse the turkey thoroughly inside and out with **cold water**—food safety requirements—and then pat dry with paper towels.

Have your roasting pan greased with olive oil and ready beside the sink so that once your turkey is rinsed and patted dry, you can transfer it breast side up into your roasting pan.

Remember to start with clean well washed surfaces and wash your hands, utensils, and surfaces between preparation stages.

TIP - There are all kinds of advice about what to do with the inner cavity. What I do is **lightly salt both cavities and throw part of a bunch of loose fresh parsley and a few fresh branches of rosemary & thyme.** Feel free to do what you usually do here. Just remember not to put a bunch of stuff in the cavities. The heat needs to move around in there to cook the bird evenly.

SECRET #3

Take your soften butter and mix in about a teaspoon each of fresh rosemary and thyme (or dried if you don't have fresh).

Now with the turkey sitting breast side up, **start at top rim of the big cavity and gently separate the skin from the breast.** Don't remove it; just separate it enough so that your hand can fit inside. Make the opening extend down all sides of the turkey.

Now with your hands **smear the butter/herb mixture evenly on the turkey flesh under the skin** . When you're done, gently pat the skin back in place.

The butter will help keep the white meat moist during cooking.

TIP - Now lightly brush olive oil over the outside top of the bird and sprinkle it lightly with salt and pepper.

(Do not close the cavities. The heat needs to circulate in order to heat the turkey evenly.)

SECRET #4

Carefully flip the turkey over so it is now breast side down. This is its final cooking position. Cooking a turkey breast side up actually doesn't make sense. The juices drain out of the white meat—which is the driest—and flows down into the brown meat which doesn't need it. The white meat is exposed to the heat and the brown meat is protected underneath and moistened by the juices in the pan. So flip the whole equation and you end up with protected, juicy white meat. The brown meat cooks more quickly so the whole bird is ready at the same time.

Brush the side of the turkey that is now facing up with olive oil and lightly sprinkle with salt and pepper.

If you're making gravy put the mixture of vegetables that you've already prepared around the turkey in the roasting pan.

Put the probe from the digital thermometer into the thickest part of the turkey's thigh. The probe should not touch bone and the tip of it should rest approximately in the center of the thickest part of the thigh.

Do not cover!

Place the turkey in the oven that you preheated to 475 degrees with the cable from the probe coming out of the oven to the digital thermometer. Make sure both parts of the digital reader—if there are two—have batteries in them and are turned on and set properly.

SECRET #5

You should have the oven preset at 475 degrees.

Think of the way you grill a really great steak. The idea is to sear the outside of the meat and keep the juices inside. The same theory works for turkey.

Set your timer and cook the bird for 30 minutes at 475 degrees.

When the timer goes off turn the oven down to 300 degrees and set the timer for two hours.

DO NOT open the oven and DO NOT baste.

When the timer goes off again reduce the heat to 250 degrees.

DO NOT open the oven and DO NOT baste.

Cooking the turkey this way should take approximately 15 minutes per pound to cook before you need to start watching the thermometer. (So a 16lb turkey would take 4 hours – ½ hour at 475, 2 hours at 300 and an hour to an hour and a half at 250.)

Once you turn the oven down for the last time, even though you know approximately when it will be ready **you need to start checking your digital thermometer on a regular basis.**

When the digital thermometer reads 160 degrees remove the turkey from the oven. I know some of you have heard that you cook a turkey until it reaches 180, however, this is no longer true. The powers that be now recommend that you cook a turkey to 165 degrees. What you need to know is that your bird will continue to cook after you take it out of the oven and its internal temperature will increase by another 5 – 10 degrees.

(Important note; one of the reasons for the previous recommendation of 180 degrees was to make absolutely sure the turkey was safe to eat. But it was assumed that people would mishandle the bird in regards to thawing and refrigeration. Be sure to carefully follow all of the instructions regarding food safety in this recipe and you won't have any problems.)

After you remove your turkey from the oven let it sit for 30 minutes before carving so that the turkey cooks the last few degrees.

If you're making gravy, remove the bird from the roaster and flip it so it sits breast side up. Remove, cool and then puree the roasted vegetables and follow your usual procedure for making gravy. Then add the puree back in **before you add your thickening agent;** you may need very little or none at all. Your gravy will be better for you and your kids will be getting a serving of veggies with every scoop of gravy.

Now enjoy the best turkey you've ever had.