



TAKE CONTROL OF  
**THANKSGIVING  
DINNER**

*by* **JOE KISSELL**  
**\$9.99**

**2<sup>ND</sup>  
EDITION**

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# Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of Thanksgiving Dinner, Second Edition*, version 2.0, published in October 2023 by alt concepts. This book was written by Joe Kissell and edited by Karen G. Anderson.

Preparing a complete Thanksgiving dinner for a crowd can be a daunting task, but this ebook lays out the entire process, complete with easy recipes and detailed, step-by-step instructions. If you've volunteered (or been volunteered!) to make Thanksgiving dinner this year and you want to ensure that everything goes smoothly, this ebook will keep you organized, focused, and on track.

If you want to share this ebook with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would with a physical book: "lend" it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a copy for careful reading or reference.

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## Updates and More

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You can access extras related to this ebook on the web (use the link in [Ebook Extras](#), near the end; it's available only to purchasers). On the ebook's Take Control Extras page, you can:

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## What's New in the Second Edition

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As I write this in October 2023, it has been 11 years since this book was last updated, and 17 since it was originally published! During that time, *nothing* has changed about how you roast a turkey or mash potatoes, so even someone with an old version of this book would have no problem following its instructions. However, the book was showing its age in a number of ways, and a refresh was long overdue. Here's what has changed in this edition:

- I updated the manuscript to use our current layout and follow the latest version of our style guide, which involved a lot of tweaky text changes and some judicious editing to make various elements fit in the available space.
- Many of the links to websites had changed or broken, so I updated or deleted them as needed.
- After taking notes last year when I cooked Thanksgiving dinner, I made some small adjustments (let's call them "bug fixes") to a few of the recipes. For example, I made some clarifications about how to dry bread for stuffing (see [Prepare Stuffing](#)), adjusted the temperature at which you cook the giblets for the gravy (see [Make Gravy](#)), and added a note about working with buttermilk for "upgraded" mashed potatoes (see [Make Mashed Potatoes](#)).
- I cleaned up the timetables ([Day Before Thanksgiving Schedule](#) and [Thanksgiving Day Schedule](#)), which mysteriously had some missing steps.

# Introduction

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time of family togetherness, good food, and all-around positive vibes—for most of us. For the cook, however, it's often a time of stress and grumpiness! Putting together a feast like this is an unusual feat even for experienced cooks. If you've never done it before, it can be terrifying. Many things can go wrong, but you can avoid or solve virtually every problem if you plan well and have the right tools and information within reach.

I'm a foodie from way back, but I make my living writing about computers. In technical writing, my goal is to break down complex and confusing computer tasks into simple, easy-to-follow steps. In this book, I do the same with Thanksgiving dinner, breaking down complex and confusing cooking tasks into simple, easy-to-follow steps. Although it's easy to find recipes for the individual components of Thanksgiving dinner, this book does more: it walks you through all the logistics of the operation, gives you important details that recipes often omit, and helps you deal with the unexpected.

Anyone who wants to prepare Thanksgiving dinner from scratch can benefit from these instructions. This may be the first time you've cooked Thanksgiving dinner, or perhaps you've tried cooking one in the past with dubious results. You might be a working parent, a guy who usually leaves major cooking to the women, or simply someone who's better at cooking than planning (and needs help with logistics). Whatever the case, I can help you put together the entire meal from start to finish with minimal stress, so you can enjoy the holiday!

For a great Thanksgiving feast, you want all the basic dishes to be prepared well, taste good, and be ready at the right time. You *can* pull this off if you stick with my recipes and timeline as much as possible. There are a million ways to cook each of these dishes, and what you see here may not be the way your mom or your favorite celebrity chef does it. But after extensive testing of recipes and procedures in this book, I can assure you that if you follow them, you'll get good results.

What's on the menu? It's a classic, traditional American and Canadian Thanksgiving dinner:

Roasted Turkey  
Stuffing  
Mashed Potatoes  
Gravy

Cranberry Sauce  
Candied Sweet Potatoes  
Pumpkin Pie

I've included a few other options, such as a vegetarian main dish (see [Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish](#)) and green vegetables (see the sidebar [What About the Greens?](#)), but in general, I stick to the basics. By the way, this meal is *not* low in fat, carbs, or salt. Sorry, dieters!

Although you'll be preparing almost everything from scratch—using fresh, whole ingredients where feasible—I understand that due to time, money, or space constraints, you may have to compromise here and there. So I've included a series of “Cutting Corners” sidebars with simpler approaches you can use if you get into trouble. On the other hand, if you're feeling more ambitious and want to get fancier, you may be interested in the “Upgrading” sidebars (for a few of the dishes), which tell you how to add extra flavor, texture, and finesse.

This book contains detailed instructions, but for your convenience, a separate “Print Me” file includes compact versions of all the recipes, the schedule, and the shopping list. You can [download the “Print Me” file here](#).

Before I set you loose, I want to tell you what assumptions I made when writing this book. I assume:

- You have at least basic kitchen skills (such as chopping vegetables and melting butter without burning it).
- You have an average-sized kitchen with a reasonably large oven.
- You'll have at least one helper. (See [Appendix D: What If?](#) if not.)
- You'll be cooking for eight to twelve people. (See [Appendix B: Scaling Recipes](#) if not.)

- You'll purchase ingredients and supplies well in advance. (See [Appendix C: Last-Minute Thanksgiving](#) if not.)
- You'll do some cooking and prep work the day before.
- You'll read this *whole* book before you do any cooking, prepping, or even purchasing of ingredients!

Last but not least, I assume that cooking Thanksgiving dinner can and should be fun! With these instructions under your belt, you'll be ready to relax and enjoy cooking and eating on Thanksgiving.

# Quick Start

Because the most important thing you can do to ensure a successful Thanksgiving dinner is prepare well, I strongly urge you to read this entire book before you do anything else—and do that at least a week before Thanksgiving. At the very least, read [Plan Ahead!](#), [Obtain Supplies](#), and [Obtain Ingredients](#), and be sure to take a good look at [Appendix E: The Schedules](#).

## ***Print out your reference materials:***

- The separate “Print Me” document (available [here](#)) includes your shopping list, schedule, and recipes. Print these out now so they’ll be handy when you need them.

## ***Prepare for the big day:***

- Work through the [Plan Ahead!](#) chapter. Follow the steps provided to determine how many people you’ll be serving, what dishes you’ll prepare, and whether you want to cut any corners or upgrade certain recipes. Using the “Print Me” document as a guide, you’ll also gather the necessary equipment and ingredients, and review your cooking schedule with your helper.

## ***Do day-before preparation:***

- To make your life easier when you’re cooking, first [Prepare the Dining Room & Kitchen](#).
- [Prepare the Turkey](#) by setting it to soak in a brine solution for several hours.
- While the turkey is brining, you can do some of the initial steps to [Prepare Stuffing](#) and [Make Gravy](#)—making the turkey broth with neck and giblets, and combining it with a simple roux. You can then [Make Cranberry Sauce](#), [Make the Orange Dish](#), and [Bake Pumpkin Pie](#).

### ***Do Thanksgiving Day tasks:***

- Your biggest job on Thanksgiving is cooking the turkey. And when it's done, be sure you know how to carve it. See [Roast and Carve the Turkey](#).
- While the turkey is roasting, you'll [Make Mashed Potatoes](#) and finish the last steps in [Prepare Stuffing](#).
- After the meal, you'll want to [Deal with Leftovers](#).

### ***Deal with special situations:***

- If your guest list includes vegetarians, check out [Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish](#).
- For a crowd smaller than eight or larger than twelve, see [Appendix B: Scaling Recipes](#).
- What if you have to make Thanksgiving dinner in a hurry and haven't had time to prepare? See [Appendix C: Last-Minute Thanksgiving](#).
- If your guests include vegans or people with food allergies, or if you're unable to find a helper, be sure to consult [Appendix D: What If?](#).

# Plan Ahead!

The most important thing you need to make Thanksgiving Dinner a success—more important than the right kind of potatoes, a great turkey, or an instant-read thermometer—is a good plan. You’re going to be juggling preparation of at least half a dozen dishes that all have to be ready at the same time. To pull this off, you want to start with a clear idea of what has to happen when.

The bulk of your preparation will be divided into three phases: tasks that happen on Thanksgiving Day, tasks that happen the day before, and tasks that happen the week before (or, in some cases, even sooner).

But before you start any of that work—ideally, as much as a month before Thanksgiving—you need to do the planning that I describe in this chapter, because it will influence the choices you make later on. If you’re reading this much closer to Thanksgiving, don’t panic—just go through these steps as soon as possible, and before proceeding with other tasks such as obtaining supplies and ingredients.

## **Recruit a Helper**

Although it’s possible to cook the entire meal single-handedly, you’ll find it easier and more fun if you have an assistant—and my instructions assume that you have, at times, four hands available. You’ll be coordinating, delegating, and doing most of the tricky stuff, while your assistant will focus on simpler tasks. Don’t wait until Thanksgiving morning to ask for help, though! Start scoping out potential helpers several days (or more) in advance.

If you happen to have a willing family member who’s an experienced cook, you’re all set. None of the tasks you’ll be assigning requires great skill, though: if someone can chop celery or operate a mixer, that’s enough ability to serve as your sous chef.

Children can make great helpers too, of course! Depending on their age, strength, or coordination, you may need to modify my recommendations. Young kids and knives, for example, are not a good combination.

Here are the major tasks you can start way ahead of time to make things go more smoothly:

1. Invite your guests, and start to get a good idea of how many people you'll be serving.

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***Harmonious holiday:*** *You know the saying: you can choose your friends but not your relatives! If you want to change familiar (and perhaps annoying) family dynamics, try inviting a few carefully chosen friends to put family members on their best behavior.*

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2. Decide which dishes you'll serve. Read the sections of this book that cover preparations, as well any appendixes that apply to your situation. Decide which dishes you'll make as described—and whether you want to cut corners or upgrade (described in sidebars at the end of most recipes), if you plan to substitute any of your own recipes, and if you need to halve or double any recipes.
3. If you haven't done so already, print the “Print Me” document. Decide if the recipes from the “Print Me” have you covered (these recipes are meant to be taped up in your kitchen) or if you'll need to have this book available while you cook.
4. If you'll also need the book available, decide whether you can safely put a laptop, iPad, or ebook reader in your kitchen; if not, you may want to print selected pages from this book. Note that you can download a PDF version of this ebook from the Take Control website. To do so, click the “access extras” link in [Ebook Extras](#).

You may want to annotate whatever printouts you have with notes so that any info you need while cooking will be readily available.

If you'll also be cooking from other cookbooks, or downloaded recipes from the web, you may want to put bookmarks in appropriate spots or make photocopies, or printouts, of those recipes.

5. Get ready to acquire any equipment and food that you'll need. To do this, review the shopping list you printed from the “Print Me” document. Keeping in mind which dishes you plan to serve and any

# Obtain Supplies

Perhaps it's a corollary of Murphy's Law: you always find yourself missing that essential piece of cooking equipment at the most inconvenient moment. At Thanksgiving, that could mean taking the turkey out of the oven and realizing you don't have a large enough serving platter, or a gravy boat, or enough serving spoons. Although these things may sound insignificant now, they won't be when your guests are hungry and all the stores are closed. Well before Thanksgiving—say, one or two weeks ahead—double-check to make sure you have all the following items. And really *check*: sure, you have a roll of aluminum foil in the cupboard, but if you didn't notice you're down to your last six inches, you'll be in trouble.

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***Far out:*** *If you live far from good sources for any of these items and need to buy them online, allow yourself even more time—at least three weeks.*

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You may already have many of these things, but you might need to locate them on the top shelf of the cupboard or in a dark corner of the basement. Find them now and put them in a handy place. Before heading to the store to buy things you don't have, consider whether you'll use them again—and if so, whether you'll use them more than once a year. It's not worth the expense and clutter to own lots of kitchen gear you rarely need, so consider borrowing the missing items from a friend or relative. Alternatively, many of these items can be found inexpensively at a thrift store, garage sale, or flea market.

Some things that I list may seem strange or even unnecessary. I explain exactly why you need them and how to use them in the instructions for the appropriate dishes, so feel free to scroll ahead to find out why I recommend them.

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## Dining Room

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Make sure you have these items, and see [Prepare the Dining Room](#) for more details:

- **Tablecloth:** Find, borrow, or buy a tablecloth large enough to cover the table (or tables), keeping in mind that they may be extended with extra leaves; also consider a cheap plastic tablecloth for underneath to protect the table's finish from spills.
- **Hot pads or trivets:** You'll be moving a lot of hot containers from the oven or stove to the table; be sure you have something to hold them with and set them on. In a pinch, a folded dish towel will do.
- **Serving bowls:** Make sure you have bowls of the right size, shape, and material for the mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce. Glass or ceramic is best for serving bowls. A 4-quart (4 l) bowl should be plenty large for the mashed potatoes; the cranberry sauce can go in one medium-size bowl or two small bowls. The stuffing and the candied sweet potatoes can, if you like, be served in their baking dishes. It never hurts to have a few extra serving bowls on hand, though—especially if you have a large table (or more than one table).
- **Serving implements:** Every bowl will need a spoon or other serving utensil—you'll need one for each serving container of stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, and so on. A pie lifter or spatula is handy for serving the pumpkin pie.
- **Tableware:** Since you'll probably be feeding more people than usual, make sure you have enough plates, cutlery, glasses, napkins, and placemats (if you plan to use placemats) for all the guests. If you don't have an ongoing need for extra plates, napkins, and the like, consider borrowing extras just for this occasion, or even picking up some sturdy disposables.
- **Water pitchers:** To keep from having to get up to run into the kitchen frequently during the meal, have a couple of water pitchers for the table.

# Obtain Ingredients

I have personally had the experience of attempting to buy ingredients such as turkey, cranberries, and stuffing components on the night before Thanksgiving, only to find the supermarket sold out. Don't let this happen to you! I recommend getting every single ingredient 48 hours or more in advance (and many can be purchased much further ahead). Give yourself a comfortable margin of error. And don't forget: all these items are also listed in the "Print Me" file.

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## The Turkey

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The most important ingredient you'll need to obtain is the turkey, and you should start thinking about this at least two weeks ahead of time. You *might* be able to walk into your local supermarket the day before Thanksgiving and find a bird of just the right size and type, but the odds are strongly against you, even if the store usually stocks a large selection of turkeys.

Because the turkey is the centerpiece of the meal, and because so many variables come into play when selecting a turkey, I'd like to go into a bit of detail as to what you can expect.

## Varieties

Turkeys come in a bewildering number of varieties. The kind that you choose will have an enormous impact on your cooking method, cooking time, and of course the flavor of the final product.

### Fresh vs. Frozen

The first major choice to make is whether to buy a fresh turkey or a frozen turkey. Fresh turkeys tend to taste a bit better, but they're also more expensive and sometimes harder to come by. Frozen turkeys must be thawed before you put them into the oven, and depending on the size of the bird, thawing (in the refrigerator) can take as long as a

week. Thus, while obtaining a fresh turkey may require more planning, *preparing* a frozen turkey takes longer. All things being equal, I recommend buying a fresh turkey if possible.

**Warning!** Whatever you do, don't buy a fresh turkey and then freeze it yourself. Commercial flash freezing and what you can accomplish in your own freezer are two very different things, and the net result of freezing your own turkey is that it will lose too much moisture in the process and turn out dry when cooked.

### **Buying a Butterball? Make a Phone Call!**

Frozen Butterball turkeys have individual serial numbers on their labels. If you call the toll-free Butterball hotline (1-800-BUTTERBALL in the United States) and give them a bird's serial number, they can tell you the date on which it was frozen. Why should you care? Older turkeys are likely to be drier and have worse flavor. They're also more likely to be sold at a discount! But you'll want to make that call *while you're in the supermarket*—before you get to the checkout. Once you've made your purchase, you're stuck with it.

### **Organic, Free-Range**

Although definitions vary, organic turkeys are generally those that have not been given hormones or antibiotics, and that have been fed only organically grown grains (with no animal byproducts). Free-range turkeys were raised without cages and permitted to run around freely. Usually, but not always, these two attributes go together. Many people prefer the taste of organic, free-range turkeys, which tend to have more muscle and less fat than cage-raised turkeys. In general, organic, free-range turkeys are sold fresh, not frozen.

### **Kosher**

Some fresh and frozen turkeys are sold as “kosher,” which means not only that they've been certified as kosher, but that they've been specially treated with salt as a preservative. The salt in a kosher turkey eliminates the need for brining (see [Prepare the Turkey](#)), and the flavor is generally excellent. However, kosher turkeys also have pinfeathers (in some cases, many of them) that you must remove using tweezers or

# Follow Your Plan

The planning that you did back in [Plan Ahead!](#) will serve you well now, because you know how many people you are cooking for, which recipes you are making, what equipment you are borrowing, which dishes guests are bringing, and what you still need to buy. You also have printouts of the graphical schedule for following your plan, so you can refer to those for a handy overview of this chapter.

Now it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work!

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## Earlier in the Week

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About a week before Thanksgiving, you should start thinking about these items. Some need to be done a certain amount of time before Thanksgiving, and others are just good to do before you start cooking:

- Double-check your lists to be sure you have the necessary supplies and ingredients (see [Obtain Supplies](#) and [Obtain Ingredients](#)).
- Make sure you have enough tableware for all your guests; if not, borrow some extras.
- If you are using a frozen turkey, defrost it in the refrigerator—allow one day of defrosting for every 4 pounds (about 2 kg).
- Now that you have your turkey, make sure your brining container is the right size and that your plans for keeping it cool will work (see [Select a Brining Container](#)).
- If your dining room or kitchen need more than about an hour of cleaning and decluttering (see [Prepare the Dining Room](#) and [Prepare the Kitchen](#), ahead), start early!
- Make sure you have any decorations you want to use.
- Determine how you'll make table space: Depending on the number and ages of your guests and the size of your dining area, you may

need to add leaves to your dining room table, set up the notorious “kids’ table,” or otherwise create extra eating space. As you consider how much table space you need, keep in mind that you will have a lot of food, and that a little extra elbow room is always appreciated. At the same time...

- Find enough chairs for everyone. Don’t leave this to the last minute! In fact, I recommend arranging the chairs around the table(s) before deciding you have enough table space. I’ve underestimated chair space more than once and regretted it!
- Make sure you have a tablecloth large enough to cover the whole table, with any extra leaves—and additional tablecloths for any auxiliary tables. If your table has a finish that could be damaged by exposure to moisture or heat, consider putting a flannel-backed plastic tablecloth underneath the main tablecloth.
- Make sure your oven is reasonably clean—you don’t want old spills to burn while you’re roasting the turkey.
- If you’re drying fresh bread for the stuffing, set it out two days or so in advance (assuming the humidity is relatively low), or dry it in your oven just before doing the other stuffing preparation tasks the day before Thanksgiving.
- Time permitting, feel free to [Make Cranberry Sauce](#) several days in advance. It keeps well, and that’s one less thing you’ll have to think about the day before Thanksgiving.
- Review your day-before and day-of cooking schedule with your helper. Make sure you both have a clear idea of who’s doing what and when. If feasible, ask your helper to read this entire book too.
- If you’ve never carved a turkey before, watch a great video on the [Butterball website](#) that shows you how it’s done.

And most important of all:

- Clear lots of space in your refrigerator and freezer! You’re going to be putting a huge turkey in there, along with many other ingredients. And once you start preparing food, you’ll need space to keep

# Prepare the Dining Room & Kitchen

The bulk of work preparing Thanksgiving dinner involves cooking, but that's only part of what has to happen. All those other little details, such as digging out the right tablecloth and extra cutlery, can trip you up at the last minute when you're busy juggling a turkey and a potato masher. Even something as simple as having a disorganized kitchen can get you into trouble. So to avoid all these hassles, I recommend setting aside an hour or two—earlier in the week, if possible, but no later than the day before—to get the dining room ready. You can get started on the kitchen, too, and that way you'll have just some dish-washing and drying to do Thanksgiving morning.

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***Share the love:*** *Most if not all of these tasks can be done by your faithful helper! Consider conscripting an assistant to do this work on the day before while you're brining the turkey and making the cranberry sauce.*

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## Prepare the Dining Room

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You might have a large formal dining room that you always keep scrupulously tidy, a dining room that collects clutter—is there still a table under all those old magazines and newspapers?—or anything in between. You might also need to press a larger room into service if you're expecting quite a few guests.

Whatever the case, consider these tips for getting the dining area ready the day before:

- **Declutter:** This includes not only cleaning off the table but also making sure there's plenty of floor space to maneuver; all those chairs and relatives can make even a large room seem cramped.

- **Clean:** Depending on the room and your cleaning standards, this may involve dusting, vacuuming, mopping, or even washing windows. Best to get that all done the day before!
- **Decorate:** This is optional, of course, but a few small, tasteful decorations can make your home look more festive and welcoming. Consider, for example, setting out a cornucopia (table space permitting!); candles in nice candlesticks; a vase of fresh flowers; your kids' holiday artwork; (small) ornamental pumpkins, squash, or corn cobs (on the mantle, coffee table, or another out-of-the-way spot); or a string of colorful autumn leaves. You might have an extra vase handy, too, in case a guest surprises you with flowers.
- **Think about counter space:** Besides full place settings, you'll have (at least) half a dozen large serving dishes on the table, not to mention the turkey platter, a pitcher or two of water, a few decorations, and all those items you weren't expecting guests to bring. Unless you have a truly huge dining room table, you'll need to place some of the serving dishes on a tablecloth-covered hutch or buffet. (In a pinch, use a sturdy card table or bookcase.) As always, too much counter space is always better than too little.

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**Buffet line:** *Unless you have an exceptionally large table, think about putting all the food (except perhaps the gravy, cranberry sauce, and other condiments) on a sideboard or a separate table, and allowing guests to serve themselves there rather than passing large, heavy, hot dishes around a crowded table. If, however, you do plan to pass dishes around, it's always helpful (and I'm being completely serious here) to announce at the beginning of the meal whether dishes will go clockwise or counterclockwise!*

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- **Put the tablecloth(s) on the table(s).**
- **Set out tableware:** You need not set the table a day in advance, but be sure you've located and set out all the dishes, cutlery, glasses, napkins, placemats, and any other table supplies you plan to use. In the process, you may notice missing items, dishes that need washing, or silverware that could use some polish; attend to those things

# Prepare the Turkey

If you watch cooking shows on TV or read cooking magazines, you've probably noticed that one of the big trends in recent years has been *brining* certain kinds of meat before cooking them. A brine is nothing more than a salt solution, so brining is just a fancy name for soaking the meat in saltwater.

Why brine?

Brining accomplishes several important things at once. First, it gets more moisture into the meat. In the case of turkey, and particularly the breast, this is a very good thing, as the moisture not only prevents unappetizing, dried-out meat, but also helps the turkey to cook more evenly. Of course, simply soaking the bird in plain water would make it moister, but the salt component is very important too. A bit of the salt seeps into the meat along with the water, and that salt helps the meat to retain water, keeping it moister during roasting. Salt is also a flavor enhancer, so it amplifies the natural turkey flavor. The result is that a brined turkey is more flavorful and moister than an unbrined turkey—without tasting noticeably salty. A brined turkey is also more forgiving; it's slightly less prone to overcooking.

**Note:** Other ways of getting salt into a piece of meat, include rubs and marinades. (A kosher turkey essentially gets a salt rub, while a pre-basted frozen turkey is injected with a salt solution.) For fresh turkeys, brining produces the best results with the least effort.

Brining is by no means a difficult or complex process, but it is potentially tricky in one respect: temperature. You will be soaking your turkey for somewhere between 4 and 12 hours, and during that entire time, it must be kept cold—above freezing but under 40°F (4°C)—to inhibit the growth of bacteria. Keep that in mind when choosing a container and a storage spot, as I describe just ahead.

**Warning!** If you're using a kosher turkey or a pre-basted frozen turkey (such as a frozen Butterball), do not brine it! Your turkey already has plenty of salt, and brining could raise the sodium content to an unhealthy level. Just follow the steps in [Get the Turkey Ready for Brining](#) and then pop it back in your refrigerator.

### **Cutting Corners: Turkey**

If you can't brine a fresh turkey due to space or time constraints, your best bet is to buy a flash-frozen basted (or "self-basted") turkey. The net effect is essentially the same, and the taste will still be excellent. But you'll need to plan ahead for defrosting, which can take three to four days (one day in the fridge per 4 pounds). If you've bought a frozen turkey but don't have time to defrost it properly in the fridge, see [Last-Minute Turkey](#) for directions for quick thawing.

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## **Think About Timing**

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I provide two brining formulas: one in which the turkey soaks for 4 to 6 hours, and one that requires 8 to 12 hours. Before you begin, consider your schedule for the rest of the day. My suggested schedule starts the brining on the day before Thanksgiving, with the turkey soaking while you prepare the other day-before dishes, and then coming out of the brine that evening (so it can rest in the fridge overnight). For some people, an overnight soak makes better sense, putting the turkey in the brine right before going to bed the night before Thanksgiving. Other schedules are possible too, and what works best for you will depend on your family obligations, availability of a helper, and what time you plan to serve dinner.

The point is that you should pick a time to begin the brining that's either 4 to 6 hours from the time you'll end or 8 to 12 hours from the time you'll end, and choose your brine formula accordingly.

# Prepare Stuffing

The great thing about stuffing is that you can vary the recipe dramatically and still end up with a perfectly delicious end result. The basic ingredients of a turkey stuffing are bread, *aromatics* (celery and onion), stock or broth, a few spices, and a bit of butter. Of course, lots of stuffings get fancy with sausage, oysters, chestnuts, fruit, cornbread, or any of a zillion other modifications. We're going to stick with the standard (though I provide other suggestions in the [Upgrading Stuffing](#) sidebar, at the end of this chapter). If you have a family recipe for another type of stuffing, and your guests expect it, feel free to use it instead.

## In or Out?

There are two broad schools of thought about stuffing: one says to cook it inside the turkey (in which case it truly is *stuffing*) and the other says to cook it separately (in which case it's sometimes called *dressing*).

If you cook the stuffing inside the turkey, it will absorb a good bit of moisture and fat from the turkey—and along with it, lots of flavor. Stuffing the turkey is a (slightly awkward) extra step, as is removing the cooked stuffing, though a stuffing bag can simplify both greatly.

But the main argument against stuffing the turkey is that the stuffing takes a long time to heat up, while spending significant time in contact with uncooked meat. That's a recipe for bacterial growth, and of course the last thing you want to do is make your guests sick!

However, you can solve this problem quite easily. First, make sure the stuffing is very hot when you put it into the bird. And, second, before you take the turkey out of the oven, check the stuffing's temperature. If it's 160°F (71°C) or higher, you're completely safe.

Because the taste of genuinely stuffed stuffing is better, we'll be cooking it in the bird. But we'll also make some extra, cooked separately, because you can never have too much stuffing!

Most of the stuffing preparation should be done the day before Thanksgiving. Just before you put the turkey in the oven, you'll perform the last two steps: combining the wet and dry ingredients, and heating the stuffing.

***Ingredients:***

|                                               |                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| ½ cup (125 ml) unsalted butter<br>(one stick) | 1 teaspoon ground pepper                                    |
| 4 large celery stalks                         | 2 loaves (16 oz./450 g each) white<br>sandwich bread, dried |
| 1 large onion                                 | or                                                          |
| 1 teaspoon dried sage                         | 2 bags (14-oz./400 g) of plain dried<br>bread cubes         |
| 1 teaspoon dried thyme                        | ½ cup fresh parsley                                         |
| 1 teaspoon dried marjoram                     | 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth                             |
| 1 teaspoon salt                               |                                                             |

***Only if upgrading:***

2 medium apples (replacing half the celery)  
or  
1–2 cups chopped fresh mushrooms

***Ingredient notes:***

- **A few words about the bread:** For the best texture, the bread should be thoroughly dried before you make the stuffing. You can dry fresh bread by tearing it into small pieces and laying them on a counter or, better yet, wire cooling racks for about two days, depending on the humidity. If you are pressed for time, you can tear up the bread, lay the pieces on cookie sheets, and bake them in a 300°F (150°C) oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until thoroughly dry (but not browned). Or you can simply buy packages of plain dried bread cubes.

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***It's a Wonder:*** Some brands of bread, such as Wonder Bread, come in 24-ounce loaves rather than 16-ounce loaves. Be sure to check the weight and adjust the quantity accordingly if necessary.

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- **As for chicken broth:** If you have some homemade chicken or turkey stock, by all means use it. But you'll get dandy results using

# Make Gravy

Next to pie crusts, nothing strikes fear into the hearts of inexperienced cooks more than gravy. Everyone has heard horror stories about gravy that was too lumpy, too thick, or too thin, or tasted burnt. And yet, my feeling about gravy is that it's only a problem because most of the recipes are unnecessarily complicated, and because a few fundamental principles of gravy making are poorly understood.

In a nutshell, turkey gravy has only two (or maybe three) major components:

- **Broth:** Generally, the broth is made by cooking the neck and giblets, adding liquid, and straining. We're going to save some time and effort by supplementing the giblet flavors with a healthy dose of store-bought chicken broth.
- **Roux:** A roux is nothing more than a heated mixture of flour and fat—the fat can be butter, oil, meat drippings, or whatever. This is what thickens the gravy. The roux gets darker, and acquires a stronger flavor, the longer you cook it. But cook it too long or at too high a temperature, and it can burn. We'll make a quick and easy butter roux.

The above two items can be made (and combined) the day before Thanksgiving, and by themselves, they make a completely acceptable gravy. To make an even better gravy, though, after the turkey comes out of the oven, you can upgrade it with a third component:

- **Drippings:** All the little bits that accumulate in the bottom of the roasting pan as the turkey cooks can be drained of fat and used to add flavor and body to the gravy.

The essence of gravy making is to add the hot broth to the roux, set the mixture aside, and then (if you like) add the drippings later, when they're ready.

Beyond that, you'll find many variations. Some people chop up portions of the giblets and add them to the final gravy. Some people include onions, carrots, or other vegetables when making the broth. Some people add spices of various kinds. We're keeping this simple, so we'll add only salt and pepper.

It's always better to have too much gravy than too little. The recipe here makes enough for about 10 to 12 guests. If necessary, you can double the recipe by using twice as much broth and roux. We'll make this the day before Thanksgiving and reheat it just before the meal. Because this recipe involves a number of steps where you're just waiting, you can work on other dishes at the same time.

### ***Ingredients:***

|                                           |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Turkey neck and giblets                   | 5 tablespoons (75 ml) unsalted butter |
| 2 tablespoons (30 ml) canola oil          | ½ cup (125 ml) all-purpose flour      |
| 5 cups (1200 ml) low-sodium chicken broth | salt and pepper                       |
| 3 cups (700 ml) water                     |                                       |

### ***Only if upgrading:***

1 cup (250 ml) dry white wine  
1 cup (250 ml) additional chicken broth

### ***Ingredient notes:***

Chicken broth you can find at your local supermarket comes in both cans and boxes (also known as aseptic packaging). Given the choice, go for the box—and be sure to get the low-salt variety, because the gravy should be plenty salty as it is, and you can always add more later if needed.

### ***Preparation:***

1. Take the giblets and neck out of the refrigerator. The giblets (which can be somewhat off-putting, if you're not used to animal parts; see **Figure 1**, just ahead, for help identifying them) consist of the heart (small and dark-colored), the gizzard (medium-sized, red, and roundish), and the liver (large, brown, flat, and oblong).

# Make Cranberry Sauce

Cranberry sauce of some kind is a mandatory part of Thanksgiving dinner, but the recipes, and the ways they're used, vary dramatically. Some people think of cranberry sauce strictly as the jellied stuff you buy in a can; other people like a cold cranberry relish or molded gelatin recipe; still others like a thin, sweet syrup containing whole cranberries and served hot. Some people use cranberry sauce as a condiment, spreading it on the turkey; others treat it more as a side dish. For some people, only homemade cranberry sauce is worth eating; for others, it's so insignificant in the overall menu that store-bought sauce is more than adequate.

I can't possibly resolve these deep philosophical issues here, and I realize that my own take on cranberry sauce is a result of having done things a certain way since I was a kid. But I'd like to show you one way of making cranberry sauce—a cranberry-orange relish—that's both delicious and extremely easy. In fact, making this relish was my job at Thanksgiving even when I was too young to handle a knife, so it's a fine task for you to assign to a helper of nearly any age.

This relish should be made the day before Thanksgiving. The flavor improves as the ingredients blend in a refrigerator overnight. If you use 16 ounces (450 g) of cranberries, this recipe will serve about eight to ten people. If you're expecting more guests, consider doubling it.

## **Cutting Corners: Cranberry Sauce**

I have three words to say about jellied cranberry sauce in a can: Just Say No. I'm sorry to have to put it so harshly, but that's even less authentic than instant potatoes, and you're missing out on the truly excellent flavor of real, fresh cranberries.

If you don't have the time or resources to make your own cranberry sauce, buy whole berry cranberry sauce in a jar or can, or ask a guest to make a fresh sauce or relish and bring it along.

**Ingredients:**

12–16 oz. (350–450 g) fresh or frozen cranberries

2 medium oranges

1 cup (250 ml) sugar (reduce to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup/180 ml if using 12 oz. of cranberries)

**Ingredient Notes:**

In most parts of North America, you can buy fresh cranberries by the bag at your local supermarket from October through December.

Frozen cranberries are often available year-round and make a reasonable substitute, but you will sacrifice a bit of flavor and texture. You can also likely buy fresh cranberries online, but since sources change all the time, I'll let you [do a web search](#) if that's of interest.

As for the oranges, I recommend navel (seedless) oranges if you can get them, because they'll save you the annoying step of removing the seeds and they tend to be a bit sweeter.

**Equipment Notes:**

I call for a food processor in the preparation steps that follow because you are likely to have one. However, instead of a food processor, I prefer to use a meat-grinding attachment on a stand mixer—I think it provides a better texture. If you happen to have a meat grinder, you have my blessing to use it in place of a food processor. If you have no suitable grinding device, you *could* chop the fruit finely with a sharp knife or a mezzaluna (a two-handled knife with a curved blade). But that's a lot of work. A better idea is to find another recipe (Your favorite search engine can provide you with many options). Don't use a blender—this recipe has too little liquid to yield good results. (I've tried!)

**Preparation:**

1. Wash the oranges and cut them into small pieces—but don't peel them. If you're using seeded oranges, remove the seeds.
2. Rinse the cranberries. Discard any mushy or discolored berries, along with any stem pieces you find. (If you are using frozen cranberries, rinse them, but don't thaw them first.)

# Make the Orange Dish

The orange dish? Is that really its name? Well, virtually everyone I consulted agreed that Thanksgiving dinner had to have something orange, but opinions differed as to whether that should be a dish made with sweet potatoes, carrots, or squash. My personal favorite among these, and probably the most common at Thanksgiving, is sweet potatoes, so that's what we'll be making.

I've had sweet potatoes prepared many different ways, including mashed, boiled, roasted, and fried. When I think of Thanksgiving, though, I think of *candied* sweet potatoes, which is to say, sweet potatoes covered in caramelized sugar.

*However*, there's a right way and a wrong way to make candied sweet potatoes. Rule number one: *no marshmallows*. You're not making dessert, and the dish will be sweet enough without them. Plus, several people told me it was the marshmallows that turned them off to sweet potatoes as children! This food is too good to be on any kid's "yuck" list.

## Don't You Mean Yams?

In a word: no. What most Americans and Canadians refer to as "yams" are in fact nothing of the sort. Yams are gigantic tubers that can grow up to 7 feet long and weigh 150 pounds. They're grown in Africa, Asia, and a few other parts of the world—but not North America. They look and taste vaguely like sweet potatoes, but botanically speaking, they're not even a relative of the sweet potato.

Confusingly, though, there are six different varieties of sweet potato, and you may well find that any or all of them are labeled as "yam" at your local supermarket. You may also find one variety labeled as "sweet potato" and another as "yam"; when this happens, it's usually the Jersey sweet potato that's called "sweet potato" and a Garnet or Jewel sweet potato that's called a "yam."

If you find the labels confusing, your grocer may be able to tell you what variety you're looking at. You may, however, have better luck getting helpful answers at a farmers' market or produce stand.

## Other Orange Dishes

If candied sweet potatoes don't do it for you, consider substituting one of these other orange dishes:

- ◆ [Baked Acorn Squash with Brown Sugar](#)
- ◆ [Orange Glazed Carrots](#)

To make the Thanksgiving Day schedule easier, prepare this dish the day before Thanksgiving (see [Appendix E: The Schedules](#)), and then simply reheat it after the turkey comes out of the oven.

The recipe, which should be enough for 10 to 12 people, is very simple.

### **Ingredients:**

4 pounds (1.8 kg) sweet potatoes      1 cup (250 ml) brown sugar  
2 tablespoons (30 ml) unsalted butter (plus a pat to grease the pan)

### **Ingredient notes:**

If your market has more than one variety of sweet potato (or “yam”), go for the Jewel if possible, which has a golden or copper-colored skin but a bright orange interior. A Beauregard or Garnet would make a good second choice. If possible, steer away from Jersey sweet potatoes, which have a yellowish or tan skin and a pale yellow interior.

### **Preparation:**

1. Wash the potatoes—or ask your helper to do this—but don't peel them (yet).
2. Put the potatoes in a large pot and cover with about an inch (2 cm) of cold water.

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**Unsinkable:** *Some varieties of sweet potato float, so you won't truly be covering them with water, but use enough water so they would be covered if you were to push them down to the bottom.*

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3. Over high heat, bring the water to boiling. Cover the pot, reduce the heat to low (just enough to keep it boiling with the lid on), and boil

# Bake Pumpkin Pie

During this book's development process, when a long list of writers and editors were commenting on the outline, nothing provoked such strong emotions and passionate debate as the pumpkin pie. Pretty much everyone agreed it had to be on the menu, but how to go about getting it on the table was a matter of intense disagreement.

On one end of the spectrum, some felt that for the inexperienced cook, baking a pie—and especially a pie crust from scratch—is far too scary to contemplate, and all the more so with everything else that has to be prepared. On the other end of the spectrum, experienced pie makers shared their “easy-as-pie” pie crust recipes and insisted that it's not scary at all, while emphasizing that a fresh pie is crucial to a proper Thanksgiving dinner. In between were many other opinions.

I've made plenty of pies and the process doesn't seem scary to me, but I made some lousy (though still edible) pie crusts before I got the knack of it. So I'm going to give you two equally valid paths to a good pumpkin pie and let you choose the one you feel most comfortable with: you can either make the crust yourself (it really *is* easy!) or buy a ready-made (but unbaked) crust at the store. Either way, the rest of the instructions remain the same: you'll make the filling, pour it into the crust, and bake. And frankly, other than the telltale disposable pie plate, your guests probably won't know the difference.

Along with the cranberry sauce, this is something you should make the day before Thanksgiving. Your oven (not to mention your hands) will be busy on the big day, and this pie does not need to be served hot. Besides, if you mess it up completely, you'll still have time to run to the bakery for a replacement.

## Multiple Pies

If you're expecting more than six or eight guests, a single pie won't be enough. You can easily double or triple this recipe, but instead, you might consider using different recipes for the other pie(s)—make an apple, mincemeat, or blackberry pie, for example. (You're on your own for those recipes.) Or consider making one pumpkin pie and asking a guest to bring a second, different dessert.

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## Prepare the Pie Crust

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The crust makes the pie. That is to say, a great crust can make up for a so-so filling, but a great filling can't make up for a terrible crust. Even if you've never made a pie crust, you've got an advantage in this recipe in that it's a *single-crust* pie. Many fruit pies, such as cherry and blueberry, typically have a second crust on top, and that adds all sorts of complexity to the baking process and makes the crust an even more important aspect of the pie. You don't have to worry about any of that.

All you need to do is get the right proportions of ingredients mixed together, rolled out, and put in a pie plate. Then add the filling and bake.

I studied pie crust recipes until my eyes went blurry, trying to find the best compromise among taste, simplicity, and user-friendliness for inexperienced pie bakers. The recipe here is neither the easiest nor the hardest. It has a couple more ingredients than most, but those extra ingredients make the dough easier to work with. That's a benefit when you're not feeling confident with your dough-rolling skills. It also requires no special apparatus, and can be made in about 10 minutes.

### **Ingredients:**

|                                                                                           |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 egg                                                                                     | 1 teaspoon (5 ml) salt                |
| 1 tablespoon rice vinegar                                                                 | 1 cup (250 ml) shortening)            |
| 4 tablespoons (60 ml) very cold water                                                     | 4 tablespoons (60 ml) unsalted butter |
| 3 cups (750 ml) unbleached flour (and a handful extra to use when rolling out the crusts) |                                       |

# Roast and Carve the Turkey

There are more “right,” “best,” and “ideal” ways to roast a turkey than you can shake a drumstick at. I’m going to show you one that is easier than most and is highly reliable. But before I do, I want to give you a bit of background on roasting turkeys so you understand the challenges and how best to overcome them.

The first thing to know is that the white meat (the breast) and dark meat (the drumsticks and thighs) cook at different rates. The white meat is done when it reaches about 160°F (71°C); if the temperature rises much beyond that, the meat becomes dry and loses tenderness. But the dark meat must be heated to about 170°F (77°C); at lower temperatures, it tends to be chewy and gristly. So there’s a dilemma: if you wait until the dark meat is done, the breast is too dry; if you stop roasting when the breast is just right, the legs will be underdone.

Many methods have sprung up to address this problem; each roasted turkey recipe has a different set of procedures, some of which involve special apparatus, complicated preparation steps, or changes in your oven’s temperature partway through the roasting. Because I want to show you a technique that’s as easy as possible without being error-prone, I skip procedures such as flipping the turkey (awkward and messy) and basting it (a pain, with dubious advantages). As you know already, I believe brining is essential (see [Prepare the Turkey](#), earlier). To that I’m going to add just one trick—using a foil tent over the breast for part of the cooking time.

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## A Word About Temperatures

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Regardless of which technique(s) you use, you need a reliable way to tell when the meat is at the proper temperature. Never go strictly by the tables in cookbooks and on turkey packages; for many reasons they

can be off by a wide margin. I also advise against trusting the pop-up indicators you often find in packaged turkeys, because they measure just one spot (possibly not the one you care about most) and you have no way to know how accurate they are (or even, in many cases, which temperature they're designed to indicate). The solution, which is almost foolproof, is to use a probe-type meat thermometer you put in the turkey very briefly (just 5 to 20 seconds) to obtain a reading; chefs refer to these as "instant-read" thermometers. (See the sidebar [Choosing an Instant-Read Thermometer](#), earlier.)

What you'll do is start with an educated guess as to how long the bird should cook, and then, using your instant-read thermometer, measure the temperature in three places: the thigh, the breast, and the stuffing. If fate is smiling on you, all three areas will reach their ideal respective temperature ranges at about the same time. In case they don't, I provide a handy table to show you what to do.

I said earlier that you're looking for a thigh temperature of 170°F (77°C) and a breast temperature of 160°F (71°C), but expert opinions vary as to the temperature at which a given part of the bird is "done," indicating that the turkey can be safely taken out of the oven (see **Table 1**, below). Bear in mind that all of these recommendations assume particular roasting techniques, which influence the figures considerably. All of these, however, assume that the turkey will sit for 15 to 30 minutes after being removed from the oven, during which time it will continue to cook a bit and the temperature on the inside, including the stuffing, will rise another 5°F (3°C) or so. If you prefer to follow another expert's opinion, feel free, but I've had excellent results with the temperatures I recommend.

Since it's impossible to follow everyone's recommendations, I suggest a happy medium, which is well within the range of food safety, doneness, and moistness. It also gives you a margin of error; if the temperature of any part is within a few degrees of the target temperature, you should be fine.

# Make Mashed Potatoes

Mashed potatoes should be a simple dish, but many a cook has produced mashed potatoes that were gritty, gummy, or otherwise yucky. One mistake and you can make something truly unappetizing.

The key to great mashed potatoes is choosing the right kind of potato. The best choice is Yukon Gold, a common variety you can find almost anywhere. Supermarkets sometimes label them as yellow potatoes. (If in doubt, ask your grocer.) Yukon Gold potatoes have a slightly yellowish flesh and a thin skin. In a pinch, you can substitute russet (baking) potatoes, but the result will tend to be more watery.

Mashed potatoes are best when they're hot and very fresh. As a result, this'll be the very last thing you prepare, and the last portion of the preparation will occur after you take the turkey out of the oven. (This is also why you should never ask a guest to bring mashed potatoes!)

As I described in the [Potatoes](#) section of [Obtain Supplies](#), you'll need some sort of implement with which to mash the potatoes. All things being equal, I'd use a potato ricer; a potato masher or an upright electric mixer would also work. If you use an electric mixer, be careful not to overmix the potatoes, lest they become sticky. (Handheld electric mixers are less than ideal, but if you must use one, be sure to do your mixing in a bowl with curved sides, not in the pot.)

The recipe here should serve eight to ten people. If you expect more, add one pound of potatoes for every two to three additional people (increasing the amounts of other ingredients proportionally).

## ***Ingredients:***

|                                        |                                       |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 6 pounds (2.75 kg) Yukon Gold potatoes | 3 tablespoons (45 ml) unsalted butter |
| 1½ cups (375 ml) half-and-half         | 1½ teaspoons (7.5 ml) salt            |
|                                        | ½ teaspoon (2 ml) black pepper        |

***Only if upgrading to buttermilk mashed potatoes:***

8 tablespoons (120 ml) unsalted butter (total)  
2 cups (500 ml) buttermilk

***Only if upgrading to garlic mashed potatoes:***

8 tablespoons (120 ml) unsalted butter (total)  
2 cups (500 ml) half-and-half (total)  
3 large or 4 medium heads garlic

***Ingredient notes:***

You can substitute heavy cream for the half-and-half for a richer taste if you don't mind the extra fat; for less fat, use whole (homogenized) milk instead. For tangier mashed potatoes, use buttermilk.

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***Plan ahead:*** *You'd like your mashed potatoes to be finished at exactly the moment it's time for them to go on the table, but you might not be so lucky. If you think you'll have to prepare them more than 15 minutes ahead of time, be ready to keep them warm properly with a slow cooker or a bowl over a pan of simmering water. See [Keep Mashed Potatoes Warm](#), later.*

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***Preparation:***

1. Peel the potatoes. (Yes, I'm sure.) Your helper would be happy to do this for you, as well as the next step...
  2. Cut the potatoes into chunks about an inch (2–3 cm) on a side.
  3. At the proper time (about two hours after the turkey goes into the oven; see [Appendix E: The Schedules](#)), put the potatoes in a large stockpot and cover with an inch of cold water. Add the salt.
  4. Turn the heat on high; bring to a boil.
  5. As soon as the water boils, reduce the heat to simmer and cover the pot.
- 

***All clear:*** *This is an excellent time to make sure you have an empty sink; you'll need that for draining the potatoes in step 8.*

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# Deal with Leftovers

The meal is finished, and your guests are cheerfully chatting about football or their holiday shopping plans. But you have one important task left: taking care of all the leftovers. You may think this is something that is so trivial it doesn't require any explanation—just toss everything in the fridge!—but I want to share some storage tips, information about how long food can keep in the refrigerator or freezer, and a few other words of advice. Needless to say, you'll want your helper to share in the joy of putting away leftovers!

**Warning!** You should refrigerate or freeze all leftovers within two hours after they went on the table (not two hours after the meal ends).

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## Send Food Home

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Before you start panicking about where you're going to put all the leftovers, remember that most of your guests will be happy to take some food home with them. So share the love: pack off every willing soul with a few plastic containers to enjoy over the next few days.

**Warning!** If you're planning to send leftovers home with your guests, be sure to refrigerate the food until it's time for them to leave. (Label each container with masking tape and a marker as you pack it so you'll know who gets what.)

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## Refrigerate or Freeze

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As a general rule, your Thanksgiving food can keep for a few days in the refrigerator and several months in the freezer (I note exceptions just ahead). Store leftovers in airtight plastic containers or in a double layer of foil. The key, especially with meat, is to have as little air in the

container as possible; zip-top bags make a good choice, since you can squeeze out most of the air before sealing them completely.

### ***Storing leftover turkey:***

- If you haven't already done so, remove the remaining white meat from the bones. (You can leave the meat on the drumsticks and wings.) Don't put a partially carved turkey carcass in the fridge!
- Turkey can keep in your refrigerator for up to four days.
- Frozen turkey should be used within three months.
- Do not store any other foods in the same container as the turkey.

### ***Storing other leftovers:***

- **Stuffing:** Refrigerated stuffing won't last long; eat it within two or three days. In the freezer, stuffing can last for up to a month.
- **Mashed potatoes:** Mashed potatoes can be kept in the fridge for up to five days, and in the freezer for up to ten months.
- **Gravy:** Store leftover gravy in the refrigerator for two to three days, or in the freezer for two to three months.
- **Sweet potatoes:** Leftover candied sweet potatoes will keep in the refrigerator for four days. I don't recommend freezing them.
- **Cranberry sauce:** Refrigerated cranberry sauce should be eaten within a week. You can keep it in the freezer for at least six months.
- **Pie:** Cover with foil or plastic wrap and refrigerate; eat within five days. Or freeze it for up to three months.
- **Whipped cream:** What? You don't seriously have leftover whipped cream, do you? Well, if you do, the best thing to do is eat it right now with a spoon—or discard it. Fresh whipped cream is pretty much a lost cause in the refrigerator or freezer.

# Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish

Most of the dishes in this book are vegetarian (though only the cranberry sauce is vegan). The exceptions are the turkey (naturally), the gravy, and the stuffing—though the stuffing can be made vegetarian by substituting vegetable broth for the chicken broth and cooking it outside the turkey. In other words, if you want to serve vegetarians, the main thing you need to do is replace (or supplement) the turkey with an alternative main dish.

There are lots of delicious, autumn-themed, vegetarian main dishes one could make, but we're looking for something that fits in well with the rest of the meal, that's easy to make, and that will look at least slightly impressive on the table next to, or instead of, a roasted turkey. I've received numerous suggestions, and I'd like to share two options that received particularly strong votes.

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## Tofurky

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Yes, it has a goofy name and has been the butt of many jokes, but this product made from tofu, wheat, beans, and natural flavorings has evolved over the years to have a pretty impressive—if not quite turkey-like—flavor and texture. The entire Tofurky product line is vegan, too, so this should satisfy just about anyone's dietary needs.

Tofurky comes in many forms, such as franks, burgers, and deli slices, but what you want as a main dish on Thanksgiving is the Tofurky Roast, which is large, semi-cylindrical, and even pre-stuffed. All you have to do is thaw (for at least 24 hours) and bake (for about 1½ hours (a baste is suggested, and the package includes a recipe).

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**A pair of roasts:** *If you are baking Tofurky in addition to a turkey, you might run into a small problem: Tofurky's package says to bake it at 350°F (177°C), whereas our turkey bakes at 425°F (218°C). I suggest putting the Tofurky in about an hour after the turkey, and removing it when the temperature of its stuffing gets to 160°F (71°C), which, at the higher temperature, should take about 1¼ hours.*

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Tofurky also sells vegan “Giblet” Gravy, which goes nicely with the roast, and even a boxed Tofurky Feast, which includes the roast, gravy, stuffing, and brownies. So you could make nearly the entire Thanksgiving meal with the contents of one box.

But that's exactly my chief complaint: what you're serving is not homemade, and despite being vegan it's heavily processed. Every other dish in this meal is based on using less-processed ingredients and producing a home-cooked taste.

So, if you need a dish (or two) to satisfy a vegetarian (or two) and can't cope with more cooking than is necessary, a Tofurky roast is certainly acceptable, though you might want to check with your vegetarian guests first, to see if a Tofurky is something they would like to eat. If, however, you plan to skip the turkey altogether and go completely vegetarian, or if you have time and want to make something a bit fresher and more impressive, consider the next dish instead.

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## The Polenta Dome

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Several of my friends have recommended a dish from the *Moosewood Celebrates* cookbook called a polenta dome. Polenta is a somewhat coarsely ground cornmeal prepared so that it achieves a thick, moist, and firm consistency. (It's usually called a *mush* but that's not a very appetizing word.) In this recipe, adapted from Moosewood's, you combine polenta with shredded butternut squash, sautéed garlic and onions, and cheese. Then you pour it into a mixing bowl, let it set, and then upend the bowl on a baking sheet to produce a dome shape. Bake this, and you've got a festive-looking and delicious main dish.

# Appendix C: Last-Minute Thanksgiving

The key to the process I describe in this book is preparation: having all your ducks—I mean turkeys—in a row long before Thanksgiving Day. But stuff happens. If Thanksgiving is only one or two days away and you haven't done any of the preliminary steps, don't panic. All is not lost, but you'll have to take serious action. Here are my recommendations for each dish, including tips for emergencies that may arise during an otherwise smooth cooking experience.

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## Last-Minute Turkey

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You might encounter any of several turkey situations:

- **You have a frozen turkey:** Turkeys should defrost in the refrigerator for four days or so, but if you don't have that long, you can accelerate the process by soaking the turkey in a large bucket of cold water (or even a clean sink). Remove the wrapping as soon as you can. Be sure to refresh the cold water every half hour so the exterior of the bird doesn't warm up too much. For a medium-sized turkey, this method should take six to eight hours.
- **You have a turkey (fresh or frozen) but no time to brine:** Don't sweat it. You'll give up some flavor and juiciness, but your guests will forgive you. However, instead of tenting the turkey breast with foil when roasting it, put the turkey on the V-rack breast side down for the first hour of roasting, then flip it over (using wadded up paper towels to protect your hands) for the remainder of the roasting time.
- **You don't have a turkey:** Call local supermarkets and butchers to see if they have something in the right size. If not, go for one or more turkey breasts, which you can usually find either fresh or

frozen in a supermarket, butcher's shop, or deli. You prepare them the same way as whole turkeys, except that you leave out the stuffing and roast for a shorter period of time (looking for the same final breast temperature as for whole turkeys).

- **There are no fresh or frozen turkeys or turkey breasts to be had:** See if you can find a cooked turkey breast that you can reheat. Alternatively, consider roasting a chicken instead (using the same directions, but with less stuffing inside).
- **Your turkey is taking too long to cook:** If the time estimates in this book haven't worked (which can happen for a variety of reasons), you could end up with hungry guests and an undercooked turkey. The easiest thing to do is raise your oven's temperature—you can go as high as 500°F (260°C). Also consider removing the drumsticks and putting them in a separate pan (to help both parts cook more quickly); you can serve whichever part is done first while the other finishes cooking. If the breast in particular is far underdone, try removing the stuffing (carefully!) to help hot air get into the center of the turkey. Put the stuffing you remove into a baking pan and return it to the oven so it can finish cooking.
- **Your turkey comes out of the oven overcooked:** The most likely cause of overcooked turkey is a broken thermometer. If this happens, go ahead and carve the entire turkey; you can most likely salvage meat closer to the center of the bird, which takes longer to cook. Even the drier meat might taste all right with liberal helpings of gravy!

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## Last-Minute Gravy

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Don't even think about making your own gravy if you're facing a time crunch. Go for prepared gravy from your supermarket or deli.

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## About the Author and Publisher

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Joe Kissell is the author of more than 60 books and hundreds of articles about technology. In 2017, he also became the publisher of Take Control Books, when alt concepts—the company he runs along with his wife, [Morgen Jahnke](#)—acquired the Take Control series from TidBITS Publishing Inc.’s owners, Adam and Tonya Engst. Before he began writing full-time in 2003, Joe managed software development for a living. He holds a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy and a master’s degree in Linguistics.

In his hypothetical spare time, Joe likes to travel, walk, cook, eat, and practice t’ai chi. He lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, with Morgen, their sons, and their cat. To contact Joe about this book, [send him email](#) and *please* include [Take Control of Thanksgiving Dinner](#) in the subject. You can also sign up for [joeMail](#), his low-volume mailing list, follow him on Mastodon ([@joeKissell](#)), or visit his blog at [Joe-Kissell.com](#).

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## Credits

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- Publisher: Joe Kissell
- Editor: Karen G. Anderson
- Take Control logo and all illustrations: Jeff Tolbert
- Cover design: Sam Schick of [Neversink](#)

- Take Control Logo: Geoff Allen of [FUN is OK](#)

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