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PREPARING FOR THE FEAST, SAFELY!!  

Organization is the key to a Thanksgiving made easy! Many kitchen tasks can be done well before the big feast. Knowing what those jobs are requires a schedule or game plan that leads up to the big day. It is best to plan your Thanksgiving menu early, at least one week in advance. This may not take much time since many dishes are “family traditions” and appear on the table year after year.  

Once you have established your menu, look at each recipe individually. Make a grocery list and a list of all prep work that can be done in advance, noting how far ahead each job can be done. Based on this list, create a schedule for getting a bit done each day, so that on Thanksgiving preparing and cooking the turkey is your major task.  

Here is a suggested plan for preparing the Thanksgiving feast. Your plan may differ depending on the size turkey you prepare and the individual dishes included in your menu.  

The weekend before: Think about the dry goods.  
Make a complete shopping list and purchase all dry goods. Include beverages, paper goods, and freezer items such as frozen turkey, ice cream, and frozen vegetables. Remember necessary canned goods such as cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie filling, canned fruits, vegetables, and juices. Pantry items such as flour, sugar, dried fruit, nuts, etc. can be purchased at this time also.  
Determine when to start defrosting a frozen turkey. (See safe defrosting below!)  

Two days ahead: Buy fresh foods and get some prep work done.  
Buy perishable groceries today or tomorrow (Tuesday or Wednesday before Thanksgiving). Include fresh turkey, fresh fruits and vegetables, and dairy products. Begin prep work: slice or chop any vegetables for recipes; seal tightly and refrigerate. Make salad dressings. Slice bread into cubes for stuffing; wrap tightly and store unrefrigerated.  

One day ahead: Set the table and make/bake desserts.  
Prepare pies and bake. Apples can be peeled and sliced ahead of time; simply toss them with a bit of lemon juice, seal tightly and refrigerate. Allow baked desserts to cool completely before covering.  

Three to seven hours before serving:  
Season and roast the turkey, making sure to use a meat thermometer to test for doneness. Prepare stuffing, sweet potatoes, and other vegetable dishes but do not bake them yet.
**Three hours before serving:**
Make green salads but do not put dressing on them. Prepare appetizers, cover, and refrigerate as needed. Make mashed potatoes, cool, cover, and chill; they will be warmed later. Set up coffee maker or percolator but do not turn it on.

**One hour before serving:**
Have family members put out appetizers and serve drinks to guests. Place stuffing, sweet potatoes, and other baked vegetable dishes into the oven and bake at appropriate temperature.

**One half hour before serving:**
Remove turkey from the oven, cover with foil to keep warm. Allow meat to rest 15-20 minutes before carving. Make gravy from pan drippings. Keep in mind that foods requiring chilling or heating should not remain at room temperature for more than two hours total.

**Final countdown...**
Remove side dishes from oven and place on table. Warm rolls and mashed potatoes. Transfer gravy and side dishes to serving dishes and place on table. Dress the salad. Whip cream to adorn desserts, if desired.

**Dinner is served!**
Carve the turkey after showing it off to the guests. Warm baked desserts during dinner, if desired, in a low-temperature oven. Brew coffee.

**After the main course:**
Refrigerate leftovers within the hour to prevent harmful bacterial growth. Foods that remain at room temperature for more than two hours can harbor sufficient microorganisms that, when consumed, can cause foodborne illness.

**Now to focus on Food Safety:**
No matter how immersed we are in plans and details, it is important to keep safe food handling practices in mind to ensure everyone has a happy holiday.

Keeping foods safe means limiting the time foods are held at temperatures between 40-140°. This is the danger zone where bacteria can multiply by a factor of 4 every 30 minutes. For example, 5 bacteria reproduce to 1280 bacteria in two hours if maintained at danger zone temperature.

Keeping foods safe also means keeping hands, utensils, dishes, and counter tops clean. It means washing any surface that has been exposed to raw meat, poultry, or seafood before any other food comes in contact with that surface. This greatly reduces the risk of cross-contamination--the transfer of bacteria from one food to another.

Cooking to proper temperatures is the only way to kill harmful bacteria in foods. Refrigeration will slow bacterial growth and freezing will stop it but those bacteria present before refrigeration or freezing are not eliminated and can cause illness if ingested.

Practice safe food handling this Thanksgiving by following these guidelines:
Safe Thawing:
1. Thaw turkey in its original wrapper in a shallow pan placed at the bottom section of the refrigerator. This prevents any poultry juices that develop during thawing from dripping on other foods.

NOTE: 2. Allow about 24 hours of defrost time for every 5 pounds of turkey. Thus, a 20 pound turkey will take 4-5 days to thaw.
3. Do not thaw on the counter since room temperature is within the danger zone where bacteria multiply rapidly. Bacterial growth will start on the outside surfaces of the bird as it thaws and reach dangerously high levels by the time the inside of the turkey is thawed.
4. Thawing in cold water is a safe practice if done properly. Submerge the turkey in its wrapper in a deep sink of cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow 30 minutes per pound to defrost turkey with this method.
5. Thawing in the microwave is only recommended if the turkey is cooked immediately after defrosting. Microwaving creates hot spots within foods, which can encourage bacterial growth. Do not defrost in the microwave then store the turkey in the refrigerator for cooking later.

Safe Stuffing:
1. The safest way to handle stuffing is to heat it separately in a baking dish. Roasting the turkey without stuffing greatly reduces the risk of bacterial growth and shortens the total time needed to cook the turkey.
2. If you feel you must stuff your bird, however, do so immediately prior to cooking. Never stuff the bird in advance.
3. Cook stuffing to at least 165° whether inside or separate from the bird.

Safe Cooking:
1. Always use a meat thermometer when roasting the turkey. Insert it in the thickest part of the thigh, since dark meat takes longer to cook. Do not judge doneness by appearance of the bird or its juices, or by wiggling its joints.
2. The turkey is done when the thermometer registers 180°.
3. If the turkey is done ahead of schedule, it is safe to hold it in the oven at 200°. Leave the thermometer in the bird and be sure the temperature does not fall below 140°.

Now, Safe Storing of Leftovers:
1. Keep in mind that hot and cold foods can be held at room temperature for only 2 hours before bacterial growth can become harmful. This means 2 hours after the turkey is removed from the oven it must be stored in the refrigerator or freezer.
2. Store perishable leftovers in shallow containers rather than deep narrow ones. This will increase surface area and allow heat to escape more rapidly from the food. Cooling time is shortened and bacterial growth limited. Large quantities of food should be stored in several small, shallow containers.
3. Large pots of soup can be rapidly cooled down by setting the soup pot in the sink filled with ice water. Stir to allow heat to escape and shorten cooling time.
4. Leftover turkey will keep in the refrigerator for 3-4 days; stuffing should be used in 1-2 days.

And Safe Reheating of Leftovers:
1. All leftovers should be reheated to at least 165°. Use an instant read thermometer to ensure you have achieved proper temperatures.
2. Soups and gravies should be brought to a rolling boil before serving.
For those who don’t want or need a whole bird, here is a turkey recipe using only the breast. Also try a different version of the favorite pumpkin pie.

**ORANGE-ROSEMARY ROASTED TURKEY BREAST**

*Serves 4*

1 fresh or frozen bone-in turkey breast, 4-5 pounds  
1 small bunch flat parsley, finely chopped  
1 small bunch fresh thyme, finely chopped  
1 small bunch fresh rosemary, finely chopped  
2 oranges  
1 lemon  
Pinch of ground black pepper  
Pinch of paprika

If using a frozen turkey, thaw it. Rinse and pat dry with paper towels. Preheat oven to 325°F. In a medium bowl, combine the parsley, thyme, and rosemary. Grate the peel from the oranges and lemon, then set the oranges and lemon aside. Add the peels to the herb mixture and toss until combined. Gently separate the turkey skin from the meat, keeping it attached at the edges. Spread the herb mixture under and over the skin of the turkey. Place the turkey on a rack in a large roasting pan. Cut the oranges and lemon in half and squeeze their juices over the turkey. Sprinkle with the pepper and paprika. Insert a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the breast, away from bone. Roast, uncovered, for 2-1/4 to 2-1/2 hours or until the thermometer registers 170-175°F, basting frequently with the pan juices. (Cover the turkey with foil, if necessary, to avoid over-browning.) Let stand 15 minutes before carving.

**NO CRUST PUMPKIN PIE**

1 can (12 ounces) evaporated skim milk  
1 can (16 ounces) pumpkin  
2 eggs  
3/4 cup sugar  
2 teaspoon vanilla  
1/2 cup whole wheat flour  
3/4 teaspoon baking powder  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2 Tablespoon melted margarine  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/4 teaspoon ginger  
1/4 teaspoon cloves

Spray 9” deep dish pie plate with shortening. Blend all ingredients in blender until smooth. Pour into pie plate. Bake 50 - 55 minutes in a 350°F. oven.

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