

# Gratitude & Gravy

Theresa Curry

I've followed one too many turkey trailers down I-81 in the Shenandoah Valley to ever want to buy a commercial turkey. Good thing it's easy to find a local, humanely raised turkey (see sidebar). The important thing is to order your turkey early so you can get the size turkey you prefer from a farm you trust.

Easier than finding the turkey is cooking the turkey. You just put it in the oven and roast it until done (175 F at both thighs, and 165 F at both sides of the breast). The difficulty is mainly in the logistics, no matter how well you've planned.

Then there's the question of brining, or soaking in a salt solution, which keeps the meat moist—always an issue when you're cooking turkey. But where to fit all that bird and brine when your refrigerator's full? The Splendid Table's Lynne Rosetto Kasper uses the huge Ziploc bags sold for storing blankets. She checked on the plastic—it's food safe—and the flat bottom makes it easy to pour the brine in over the turkey. She suggests putting the bird in the bag, putting the bag in a cooler, and burying it in ice, but not enough to keep it frozen.

Alternatively, submerge the bird in the brine in a stock pot and add ice often enough for a slow, safe thaw. Kasper figures 10 to 12 hours for a 12- to 16-pound bird and closer to 18 or 20 hours for 20 pounds and over. Use a cup of salt per gallon of water. Some chefs also add a cup of sugar per gallon.

Or you could plan a pleasant trip to Ayrshire Farm in Middleburg, Virginia, which sells its turkeys already brined, and you can solve the "where to keep it" question by picking it up as late as the Wednesday before Thanks-

giving. Just make sure you've pre-ordered it in plenty of time.

One of my favorite food writers, Harold McGee, revealed himself as a member of the "don't brine" community in a shocking *New York Times* article last year. Yes, he admits, brining does make the turkey reliably tender and moist, but he's disappointed with the watery, salty gravy his brined birds produce.

Taking his cue from barbecue, McGee observed that the dryness of the turkey breast was similar to the dryness of pork when cooked long enough to be shredded. Like the pitmen who've made a science out of tender meat, McGee submerges his breast slices entirely in hot juices. He makes a good pan sauce from the drippings: Take half the drippings and adjust the volume with wine, chicken stock, or turkey stock for enough to cover the breast meat, reserving the remaining drippings for a thickened gravy. Then he either slices the breast meat thin or shreds it for maximum exposure to the liquid.

I stumbled on this method last year when I needed to cook my turkey in advance for a photo. I really couldn't tell the difference between my day-old turkey and those hauled steaming from the oven in previous years. I carved last year's turkey Wednesday night, dunked the pieces in pan juice and covered it all tightly. It's fine to let the slices cool in their own juices, just as you might do for chicken intended for chicken salad, but refrigerate it within the hour.

As far as stuffing goes, choose bread with substance and plenty of fresh herbs. Sage is the star of Thanksgiving, when it's snipped into stuffing and crumbled onto root veg-

etables before they're roasted. Deirdre Armstrong of Harvest Thyme Herbs in Staunton, Virginia, makes what she calls her "Simon and Garfunkel herb mix": parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. Armstrong gives us some other Thanksgiving ideas for seasonal herbs: Tuck whole leaves of sage under skin of turkey while roasting. Or sauté whole leaves of sage in olive oil until crisp and sprinkle with sea salt and freshly grated Parmesan cheese for a garnish for your first-course soup. This also works well as a garnish for pumpkin ravioli at a vegetarian Thanksgiving.

Since we're celebrating Julia Child this year, I'm including her recipe for cooking turkey fast and hot. A friend living in Paris once searched in vain for a large turkey, only to find one when Thanksgiving dinner was just a couple hours away. The high-heat method popularized by Child allowed her to have it on the table just in time.

## Julia Child's High-Temperature Turkey

*Cook the stuffing separately in this fast method. Child notes that a turkey cooked this way may not be as tender as the slow-cooked version, but it will be a brown and juicy bird. Although not included in Child's original recipe, brining helps keep the turkey tender.*

- 1 14-pound turkey
- Juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped carrots
- 2 cups water

Preheat oven to 500 F.

Rinse out the turkey cavity and sprinkle inside with salt, pepper, and lemon juice.

*Freelance feature writer Theresa Curry contributes to a number of publications, including The Virginian Pilot, The Charlottesville Daily Progress, The Augusta Free Press, and The Harrisonburg Daily News Record.*

Place the turkey in a roasting pan and start the roasting at 500 F. In 15 to 20 minutes, when the juices begin to burn, reduce the heat to 450 F.

Add chopped vegetables and water to the pan, pouring in a little more water now and then as needed to prevent burning and smoking. A 14-pounder will roast in about 2 hours.

### **Biscuit, Cornbread & Chestnut Stuffing**

*Market Salamander,  
Middleburg, Virginia*

*Chef de cuisine Vaughn Skaggs uses leftover bread and biscuits, but you can save time by buying good-quality biscuits and cornbread. Drying the bread enables it to absorb the aromatic vegetables and turkey stock. He advises home cooks to make the dressing on the side, since thoroughly cooking the dressing results in a dry turkey.*

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Serves 6

- 1 pound biscuits (12–15 normal-sized biscuits)
- 1 pound cornbread (9-by-12-inch pan)
- Thick-cut bacon slices, chopped into ¼-inch pieces, enough for ½ cup (about 4 slices)
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 onion, diced small
- 4 cloves garlic, sliced small
- 1 leek, diced small
- ¼ cup chestnuts, diced small
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, stripped from stem
- 2 tablespoons parsley, chopped
- ¼ cup turkey giblets, chopped
- 2 quarts turkey stock

Pull the biscuits apart in big pieces. Dice the cornbread into 1-inch cubes. Let dry, uncovered, for several hours or toast in the oven until dry.

In skillet, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon and reserve, leaving half the fat in the pan.

Add 2 tablespoons of the butter to the pan with the bacon fat and sauté the onion, garlic, and leek until tender. Add the chestnuts in the last couple of minutes. Add the herbs, bacon, and giblets. Remove from heat.

Put dried cornbread and biscuit pieces in a

large bowl and add the contents of the pan. Toss quickly to mix, without breaking up the bread pieces.

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Slowly drizzle in turkey stock and mix carefully. After the bread has soaked up the stock, place the dressing in a casserole dish. Chop the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter and sprinkle on top. Bake for 30 to 45 minutes.

### **Oyster Stuffing**

*Zynodoa, Staunton, Virginia*

*Oyster stuffing is an early American colonial classic, hence a Virginia classic. Though there's no mention in our history books, oysters probably graced the first Thanksgiving table.*

*Mike Lund, Zynodoa's executive chef, tries to feature the best of Virginia at all times, so what better for the holidays than this Chesapeake treat? Except for the oysters, you probably have all the ingredients already. You could even prepare it a day in advance. If you do, just be sure to "soak" the dressing in the refrigerator, not at room temperature.*

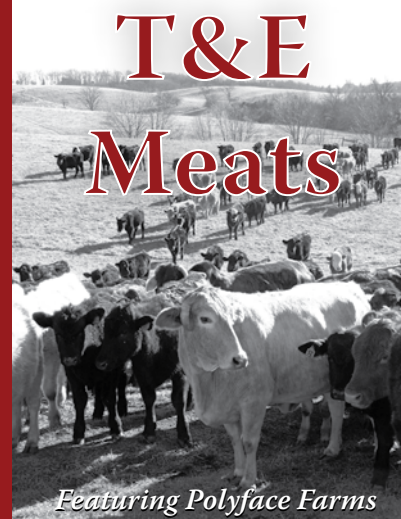
Preparation time: 90 minutes

Cooking time: 45 minutes

Yields 1 quart

- 1 stick butter, 1 tablespoon reserved
- 1 large onion, finely diced
- 1 bunch of celery, peeled and finely diced (reserve the yellow "heart" leaves)
- 20 medium oysters, sliced in half and shucked, liquor reserved (or 16 ounces shucked oysters, drained, and liquor reserved)
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 2 tablespoons fresh sage leaves, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves, stripped from stem
- 1½ pounds day-old bread, preferably French or Italian, cubed and laid out on sheet pan to dry for 24 hours
- 2 cups homemade or good-quality chicken or turkey stock, ½ cup reserved
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon coarsely ground fresh black pepper
- 1 teaspoon sugar

In a large sauté pan over medium heat, melt butter. Add onion and celery. Sauté until translucent. Add oysters, lemon juice, and Old Bay and continue to cook, stirring



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Obama campaign workers bought several of these sweet potato pies from Mom's Apple Pie Company last fall when they visited the Leesburg store.

MOLLY McDONALD PETERSON

occasionally, for 4 minutes. Stir in herbs, cook for 1 minute, and remove from heat.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the reserved oyster liquor, 1½ cups stock, eggs, salt, pepper, and sugar until thoroughly combined.

Slowly fold in the cooked oyster mix. Then fold in the bread cubes, being careful not to break them up.

Preheat oven to 375 F.

With the reserved tablespoon butter, grease a 2-inch deep baking pan, ovenproof dish, or ovenproof bowl. Gently fill with the stuffing mix, careful not to press or force too much as to enhance the fluffiness of the end product. Allow to "soak" for at least 1 hour at room temperature.

Just prior to baking, glaze the top of the stuffing with the reserved ½ cup of stock. Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil, spin, and bake for 15 minutes. Garnish with reserved celery heart leaves.

- 2 cups pumpkin, peeled and cut in ¼-inch dice
- 2 cups parsnips, peeled and cut in ¼-inch dice
- 1 sweet onion, peeled and finely diced
- 6 teaspoons strained bacon fat
- 5 cloves garlic, peeled and zested
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme
- 2 tablespoons finely minced chives
- Pinch nutmeg
- Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Roast squash, pumpkin, and parsnip pieces on lightly oiled sheet tray for 45 minutes to an hour.

Sauté onion in bacon fat until translucent. Add roasted vegetables and garlic. Toss until evenly coated with bacon fat and onions. Add thyme, chives, and nutmeg. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss and serve.



-Tom Sietsema,  
*The Washington Post*  
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### Roasted Fall Vegetable Hash

*Claire's at the Depot,  
Warrenton, Virginia*

Executive chef **David Scales** suggests that to prepare this in advance, roast the vegetables ahead of time until al dente and then reheat them with the bacon fat, onions, and spices just before serving. Use a zester for the garlic if you have one. If you don't have a zester, crush or purée the garlic so it will dissolve.

Preparation time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Cooking time: 60 minutes

Serves 6

- 2 cups butternut squash, peeled and cut in ¼-inch dice

### Sweet Potato Pie

*Mom's Apple Pie Company,  
Leesburg, Occoquan, and  
Sterling, Virginia*

Co-owner **Steven Cox** uses sweet potatoes from the family farm for this flavorful pie. Ask your vendor whether your sweet potatoes have been "cured"—allowed to rest in a warm, dry place for 10 days or so after digging. This adds to their sweet, mellow flavor and improves storage ability. Co-owner **Avis Renshaw**, Cox's wife and the "mom" of Mom's Apple Pie Company, suggests topping

the pie with whipped cream flavored with a little maple syrup. Their daughter **Petra Cox** demonstrates how to make the pie crust (and other recipes) at [monkeysee.com](http://monkeysee.com).

Preparation time: 2 hours, 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

Makes two regular 9-inch pies or one deep-dish 9-inch pie

#### For the pie crust

- 2½ cups unbleached pastry flour
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, cut into tablespoon-sized pieces and frozen for an hour before mixing
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Up to 5 tablespoons ice water

Add the flour, butter, sugar, and salt to a food processor. Using pulse option, mix ingredients together.

Add ice water to the dough one tablespoon at a time, until the dough barely comes together. When finished, transfer the dough to a bowl and place it in the refrigerator for 2 hours.

Flour the working surface well. Let the dough rest at room temperature for 15 minutes before you start working with it. Cut the dough roughly into two pieces and roll into balls. Use a rolling pin to roll out the dough. Three quick, firm passes with the pin should give you the size you need for the 9-inch pie pan. Repeat for second pie crust.

Lay the dough in the bottom of the pie pan. Roll the top edge and pinch with fingers or press with a fork to desired height and thickness.

#### For the filling

- 2 cups cooked, peeled, and mashed sweet potato
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 3 or 4 tablespoons molasses
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 3–4 eggs

Mix first eight ingredients gently. Mix in eggs until filling is smooth.

#### Baking and serving

Preheat oven to 375 F.

Pour into prepared pie shells and bake in preheated oven for 1 hour, or until knife inserted near center comes out clean.

Cool on wire rack. Serve immediately or refrigerate.

#### Ayrshire Farm

[www.ayrshirefarm.com](http://www.ayrshirefarm.com)

#### Harvest Thyme Herbs

[www.harvestthymeherbfarm.com](http://www.harvestthymeherbfarm.com)

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