



How to Brine & Roast a Fresh, Pastured Turkey

What's Special about Pastured Turkey?

When it comes to Thanksgiving turkeys, not all birds are equal. There is a distinct difference between a farm-fresh, pastured turkey and its grocery store counterpart, both in taste and nutrition. First, raising birds on pasture creates deep, rich, and complex flavor you can't find in conventional turkeys. These birds spend their days in the fresh air and sunshine, eating lots of grass and bugs, and getting plenty of exercise, just like a turkey was made to do. The result is a firm, plump bird that is full of juicy goodness.

Second, because of this lifestyle, these birds are rich in vitamins, minerals, and health-giving nutrients. Living on pasture gives these turkeys a level of nutrition that their grocery store cousins just can't match. This means a more nutritious, and delicious, centerpiece for your family and friends.

Brining

Recipe from Charlotte Smith Pastured Meats

Brining is an easy way to help ensure a juicy, flavorful turkey. Brining a turkey is similar to marinating a steak. The basic concept is to soak the bird in a mixture of salt, sugar, and water. This adds extra moisture to combat the dryness so common with turkey, as well as adding some extra flavor. Below is a simple (I like simple!) recipe for brining a turkey. It is important to note, however, that because pastured turkeys are more flavorful and juicy than conventional turkeys, brining is not necessary. Simply roasting the turkey and enjoying its natural flavor is perfectly ok.

Ingredients

- 2 cups Kosher salt (about 1 ½ cups if using table salt)
 - 2 cups sugar
 - 4 gallons water
 - Clean cooler large enough to fit the turkey and brine
 - Ice
 - 1 fresh, pastured turkey
1. Combine the salt and sugar with about a ½ gallon of warm water. Stir until dissolved.
 2. Pour brine mixture into the cooler. Add the rest of the (cold) water.
 3. Place the turkey into the brine.
 4. Pour ice over top of the turkey (the purpose of the ice is to keep the turkey cold while it is soaking in the brine).
 5. Close the lid of the cooler and place in a cool location. Allow the turkey to soak for about 12 hours total. Flip the turkey over after several hours.

Roasting

Recipe adapted from The Grassfed Gourmet Cookbook

Roasting is the key part of preparing your pastured turkey meal. This is ultimately what makes a juicy and tender finished product. Below are a few key points to remember in order to increase the quality of your cooked turkey:

- ✓ Pay close attention to internal temperature. Your aim is to roast the bird until it reaches an internal temperature of 165°F and no more (check both the breast and the thigh). Cooking longer may cause dryness. If you find the breast is at temperature and the thigh isn't, you can cut the legs off and continue to cook them while you let the remainder of the bird rest. If you don't have a meat thermometer, it is certainly a worthwhile investment.
- ✓ If possible, cook your stuffing separately. When stuffing is inside of the turkey, it too must reach an internal temperature of 165°F. Since the stuffing is on the inside of the turkey, by the time it reaches temperature, the outside (namely the breast) may be overcooked.
- ✓ Fresh, pastured turkeys cook faster than conventional, frozen turkeys. A good rule of thumb is 10-12 minutes per pound for an unstuffed turkey. If stuffing your turkey, plan on adding ½ hour to the cooking time. Have your meat thermometer ready and check the temp 30 minutes prior to the estimated finish time.
- ✓ Let the bird rest for about 20-30 minutes before carving so the juices will retain in the meat rather than running out when you slice into it.

Ingredients

- 1 turkey
 - 3 medium onions, coarsely chopped
 - 2 carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped
 - 2 stalks celery, coarsely chopped
 - 4-6 sprigs of fresh thyme
 - 2 sprigs fresh sage
 - 2 sprigs fresh oregano
 - 4 tablespoons unsalted butter or lard, melted
 - Poultry seasoning
 - 1 cup water
1. Set the oven rack to the lowest position and preheat the oven to 325°F.
 2. If brining, remove the turkey from the brine and thoroughly pat dry with paper towels (this is important to get a crispy skin).
 3. Brush the entire turkey with the melted butter or lard, even getting some under the skin of the breast (be careful, the turkey gets slippery at this point).
 4. Coat the turkey, to taste, with the poultry seasoning.
 5. Place breast side up in a large roasting pan. Stuff half of the vegetables and herbs inside the turkey and spread the other half around it in the bottom of the pan.
 6. Pour the water into the bottom of the roasting pan. Periodically check the pan and if the water evaporates before juices form in the bottom of the pan, add another ½ cup of water.
 7. Roast for approximately 12 minutes per pound until the breast and thighs reach 165°F. Check the temperature about 30 minutes before the turkey is supposed to be done.
 8. Transfer the turkey to a platter and let rest for 30 minutes before carving.
 9. Enjoy your beautiful and delicious pastured turkey!