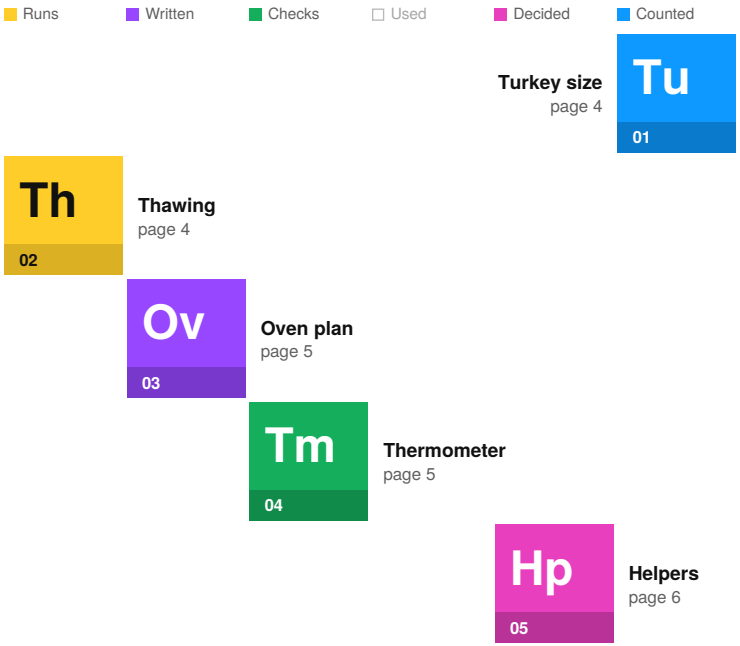
# Hosting Thanksgiving

A pocket-sized guide to getting Thanksgiving dinner on the table, for 26 November 2026.




*My friend has a lot of questions.*

# What does hosting Thanksgiving take?

Hosting Thanksgiving comes down to one big turkey, cooked safely and on time, with the other dishes fitted around it. You need a turkey of the right size, days to thaw it, a plan for the oven, a food thermometer and some help.

Most of the dinner forgives a late start. The turkey has firm numbers instead: its size, thawing time, roasting time and inside temperature.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Turkey size** | How many pounds of turkey to buy for your guests. |
| **Thawing** | Defrosting a frozen turkey in the fridge, over several days. |
| **Oven plan** | A written list of what goes in the oven, and when. |
| **Thermometer** | A probe that reads the temperature deep inside the turkey. |
| **Helpers** | Guests and family you give a whole dish or job to. |

# How does the week fit together?

Count back from when you want to eat. The example is a 16-pound frozen turkey and dinner at 4 p.m. on Thursday 26 November.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Two weeks before** | Buy a frozen turkey, about 1 pound for each guest. Buy a fresh one on Tuesday or Wednesday instead. |
| **Saturday 21 November** | Move the frozen turkey to the fridge, still wrapped, on a tray. |
| **Wednesday 25 November** | Bake the pies, make the cranberry sauce and chill the stuffing in its dish. Set the table. |
| **Thursday, 11:15 a.m.** | Turkey into a 325 °F oven, for about 3¾ to 4¼ hours. |
| **Thursday, from 3 p.m.** | Check the thermometer. At 165 °F, take the turkey out to rest at least 20 minutes. Bake the stuffing and rolls. |
| **Thursday, 4 p.m.** | Carve and eat. |
| **Thursday, by 5 p.m.** | Leftovers into the fridge, in shallow covered containers, within two hours of cooking. |

**Tip.** When you buy the turkey, write down its weight and count back to its thawing day. Put that day on your calendar.

# Turkey size

Tu
01

**Identify by** The weight on the turkey's label.

**What** **Turkey size is how many pounds of turkey you buy for the people eating.** Allow about 1 pound for each person.

**So what** The weight sets how many days the turkey thaws and how many hours it roasts.

**Field marks**

**Rule of thumb**
**1 pound per person.**

**Watch for**
**A turkey too big to thaw in time.**

**Confused with** **Leftovers**
One pound each covers dinner. For leftovers, plan about 2 pounds for each adult and 1 for each child.

# Thawing

Th
02

**Identify by** A frozen turkey and a date on the calendar.

**What** **Thawing is defrosting a frozen turkey safely before you cook it.** In the fridge, allow a day for every 4 to 5 pounds.

**So what** **Starting late leaves the middle frozen on Thursday morning.** A 16- to 20-pound turkey needs 4 to 5 days in the fridge.

**Field marks**

**Rule of thumb**
**A day per 4 to 5 pounds.**

**Watch for**
**The counter or hot water.**

**Confused with** **Fresh turkey**
A fresh turkey has never been chilled below 26 °F. Buy it on the Tuesday or Wednesday before, and keep it in the fridge.

# Oven plan

Ov
03

**Identify by** A list of dishes with oven temperatures and times.

**What** **An oven plan is a written schedule for everything that needs the oven.** The turkey comes first.

**So what** **The plan shows early which dishes won't fit.** Bake pies the day before, and the stuffing and rolls while the turkey rests.

**Field marks**

| Rule of thumb | Watch for |
|---|---|
| **Turkey goes first.** | **Clashing temperatures.** |

**Confused with** **Roasting timetable**
A roasting timetable gives the turkey's hours by weight, such as 3 to 3¾ hours for 12 to 14 pounds. An oven plan fits the other dishes around those hours.

# Thermometer

Tm
04

**Identify by** A food thermometer with a metal probe.

**What** **A food thermometer measures the temperature inside the turkey.** The turkey is safe at 165 °F (74 °C).

**So what** **Roasting times are estimates, so go by the thermometer.** Check the innermost thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.

**Field marks**

| Rule of thumb | Watch for |
|---|---|
| **165 °F in all three places.** | **Checking only one spot.** |

**Confused with** **Pop-up timer**
Some turkeys come with a pop-up timer. Check those three places with a food thermometer as well, even after it pops.

# Helpers

Hp
05

| | |
|---|---|
| **Identify by** | Guests who ask what they can bring or do. |
| **What** | **Helpers are guests and family you give a whole dish or job.** A guest might bring a side dish, or clear the table. |
| **So what** | **Whole jobs take work off your list.** People who don't cook can do the cleaning. |

**Field marks**

| Rule of thumb | Watch for |
|---|---|
| **One whole dish or job each.** | **Dishes that need your oven.** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Confused with** | **Potluck**<br>At a potluck, guests choose what to bring. Helpers bring the dish or do the job you ask for. |

# Common questions

| | |
|---|---|
| **What if it's still frozen?** | Thaw it in its wrapper in cold water, about 30 minutes per pound, changing the water every 30 minutes, and cook it right away. Or roast it frozen, for at least 50 percent longer. |
| **Should I stuff the turkey?** | USDA doesn't recommend it. Bake the stuffing in its own dish, to 165 °F. |
| **Should I wash the turkey?** | No. Washing raw turkey can spread bacteria around the kitchen. |
| **How long can food sit out?** | Two hours, or one hour above 90 °F. Then it goes in the fridge. |
| **How long do leftovers keep?** | Up to four days in the fridge, so until the Monday after. Reheat them to 165 °F. |

# Sources

These public sources were checked in October 2026.


**USDA FSIS, Safely Roasting a Turkey**
October 2026 · `fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/lets-talk-turkey-roasting`

**USDA FSIS, Your Safe Thanksgiving Guide**
October 2026 · `fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/poultry/your-safe-thanksgiving-guide`

**FoodSafety.gov, Safe Minimum Internal Temperature Chart**
October 2026 · `foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-internal-temperatures`

**Food Network Kitchen, Thanksgiving Countdown**
October 2021 · `foodnetwork.com/holidays-and-parties/articles/thanksgiving-countdown-planner`

**King Arthur Baking, Your Ultimate Thanksgiving Timeline**
October 2024 · `kingarthurbaking.com/blog/2015/11/15/thanksgiving-timeline`



Tu Th Ov Tm Hp

An Accidental Guide to…

**Hosting Thanksgiving**

A pocket-sized guide to getting Thanksgiving dinner on the table, for 26 November 2026.
Written and reviewed by a person. AI does the grunt work. Set in TeX Gyre Heros and Newsreader.
Leave a star: `accidental.info/star`

*My friend has a lot of questions.*