

## Classic Roast Turkey

### *Why This Recipe Works*

Few of us want to take chances when cooking the holiday bird. We wanted to find a way that guaranteed moist, flavorful meat and bronzed skin—a true holiday table centerpiece.

First we brined our turkey, which helped prevent the meat from drying out and also seasoned it right to the bone. After brining, we rinsed the bird of excess salt and let it rest on a wire rack in the refrigerator so that the skin dried out. This step helped ensure the skin would cook up crisp, not flabby. Placing the turkey on a V-rack allowed for air circulation all around so that the bird cooked evenly. And turning the turkey three times also helped to ensure even cooking. Finally, once the turkey was cooked, we waited 30 minutes before carving it. That might seem like a long time, but it allowed the juices in the turkey to redistribute so that, once carved, each slice was moist and full of flavor.

### *How Brining Saved Thanksgiving*

Once upon a time, the only thing the Thanksgiving turkey had going for it was tradition—and even that was tenuous, as many of us sometimes dreamed of cheating with a big buttery beef tenderloin. The problem was a familiar one. Sometimes the bird turned out juicy and flavorful, but most often, it was a dry disappointment. Passing the gravy didn't help much either. Then, 15 years ago, the test kitchen came upon an obscure technique called brining. Brining turkey involves soaking the turkey in a saltwater solution (which sometimes includes sugar) before cooking—this protects it from the ravages of heat and guarantees tender, flavorful meat from the surface all the way to the bone. (Brining does the same for other delicate white meat like chicken and pork.) How does brining work?

Simply put, the brining solution flows into the meat, distributing moisture and seasoning. In our testing, we found that while a turkey roasted straight out of its package will retain about 82 percent of its total weight after cooking, a brined turkey will retain about 93 percent of its total weight after cooking—and thus be moister and more flavorful. Once a little-known technique, brining has now become mainstream—and Thanksgiving dinners everywhere are all the better for it.

### *Recipe: Classic Roast Turkey*

Serves 10 to 12

Resist the temptation to tent the roasted turkey with foil while it rests on the carving board. Covering the bird will make the skin soggy.

- 2 cups table salt
- 1 (12 to 14 pound) turkey; giblets, neck, and tailpiece removed and reserved for gravy
- 2 medium onions, chopped coarse
- 2 medium carrots, chopped coarse
- 2 celery ribs, chopped coarse
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 cup water, plus more as needed
- 1 recipe Giblet Pan Gravy (recipe follows)

1. Dissolve the salt in 2 gallons cold water in a large container. Submerge the turkey in the brine, cover, and refrigerate or store in a very cool spot (40 degrees or less) for 4 to 6 hours.
2. Set a wire rack over a large rimmed baking sheet. Remove the turkey from the brine and rinse it well. Pat the turkey dry, inside and out, with paper towels. Place the turkey on the prepared baking sheet. Refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 8 hours or overnight.
3. Adjust an oven rack to the lowest position and heat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a V-rack with heavy duty foil and poke several holes in the foil. Set the V-rack in a roasting pan and spray the foil with vegetable oil spray.
4. Toss half of the onions, carrots, celery, and thyme with 1 tablespoon of the melted butter in a medium bowl and place inside the turkey. Tie the legs together with kitchen twine and tuck the wings under the bird. Scatter the remaining vegetables into the roasting pan.
5. Pour 1 cup water over the vegetable mixture. Brush the turkey breast with 1 tablespoon more melted butter, then place the turkey, breast side down, on the V-rack. Brush with the remaining 1 tablespoon butter.
6. Roast the turkey for 45 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven; baste with juices from the pan. With a dish towel in each hand, turn the turkey leg/thigh side up. If the liquid in the pan has totally evaporated, add another 1/2 cup water. Return the turkey to the oven and roast for 15 minutes. Remove the turkey from the oven again, baste, and turn the other leg/thigh side up; roast for another 15 minutes. Remove the turkey from the oven for a final time, baste, and turn it breast side up; roast until the thickest part of the breast registers 160 to 165 degrees and the thickest part of the thigh registers 175 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, 30 to 45 minutes.
7. Remove the turkey from the oven. Gently tip the turkey so that any accumulated juices in the cavity run into the roasting pan. Transfer the turkey to a carving board and let rest, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Carve the turkey and serve with the gravy.

### *Giblet Pan Gravy*

Makes about 6 cups

Complete step 1 up to a day ahead, if desired. Begin step 3 once the bird has been removed from the oven and is resting on a carving board.

- 1      tablespoon vegetable oil
- Reserved turkey giblets, neck, and tailpiece
- 1      medium onion, chopped
- 4      cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2      cups water
- 2      sprigs fresh thyme
- 8      sprigs fresh parsley
- 3      tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/4    cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1      cup dry white wine
- Table salt and ground black pepper

1. Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering; add the giblets, neck, and tailpiece, and cook until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add the onion and continue to cook until softened, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook until the turkey parts and onion release their juices, about 15 minutes. Add the broth, water, and herbs, bring to a boil, and adjust the heat to low. Simmer, uncovered, skimming any impurities that may rise to the surface, until the broth is rich and flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Strain the

broth into a large container and reserve the giblets. When cool enough to handle, chop the giblets. Refrigerate the giblets and broth until ready to use. (The broth can be stored in the refrigerator up to 1 day ahead.)

2. While the turkey is roasting, return the reserved turkey broth to a simmer. Heat the butter in a large saucepan over medium-low heat. Vigorously whisk in the flour (the mixture will froth and then thin out again). Cook slowly, stirring constantly, until nutty brown and fragrant, 10 to 15 minutes. Vigorously whisk all but 1 cup of the hot broth into the flour mixture. Bring to a boil, then continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until the gravy is lightly thickened and very flavorful, about 30 minutes longer. Set aside until the turkey is done.

3. When the turkey has been transferred to a carving board to rest, spoon out and discard as much fat as possible from the roasting pan, leaving the caramelized herbs and vegetables. Place the roasting pan over two burners set on medium-high heat. Return the gravy to a simmer. Add the wine to the roasting pan of caramelized vegetables, scraping up any browned bits with a wooden spoon, and boil until reduced by half, about 5 minutes. Add the remaining 1 cup turkey broth and continue to simmer for 15 minutes; strain the pan juices into the gravy, pressing as much juice as possible out of the vegetables. Stir the reserved giblets into the gravy and return to a boil. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve.