ORBIT · FREE SAMPLE

The Thanksgiving Clock

When to start the thaw, and what goes in the oven at 2:30. Two pages from The Classic Table, free.

IN THIS FREE SAMPLE

01 The thaw calculator: USDA thawing times with 2026 start-by dates

02 Thursday, one oven, one clock: the whole day from 8 am to leftovers

THE FULL GUIDE — THE CLASSIC TABLE (92 PAGES)

- The Calm Timeline for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July and Sunday supper
- 33 classic recipes: turkey, gravy, rib roast, ham, lamb, sides, rolls, three pies, the summer grill, cookies and brunch
- A preface and cited history for each feast (no Pilgrim myths)
- Complete shopping lists by buying day and store aisle, for 8 and 12
- Hosting: oven choreography, resting, make-ahead, quantities, drinks, USDA food safety, an allergen guide

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(!) THANKSGIVING · THE THAW

The thaw calculator

The single most important date in the Thanksgiving calendar is not Thursday. It is the day the turkey moves from the freezer to the fridge.

Thawing (USDA)

TURKEY	FRIDGE	COLD WATER	START BY*
4–12 lb	1–3 days	2–6 hours	Sat Nov 21
12–16 lb	3–4 days	6–8 hours	Fri Nov 20
16–20 lb	4–5 days	8–10 hours	Thu Nov 19
20–24 lb	5–6 days	10–12 hours	Wed Nov 18

*Fridge start dates for Thursday, November 26, 2026, chosen so the bird is thawed by Tuesday for dry-brining. A thawed turkey keeps 1–2 days in the fridge (USDA).

The three safe ways

Fridge (40°F or below): about 24 hours per 4–5 lb, in its wrapper, on a tray. **Cold water:** about 30 minutes per pound, wrapper sealed, water changed every 30 minutes; cook immediately. **Microwave:** only if it fits, per the manual; cook immediately. Never on the counter.

DON'T RINSE THE BIRD

Of people who washed raw poultry in a 2019 USDA kitchen study, 60% had bacteria in the sink afterward. USDA's advice: do not rinse the turkey. Pat it dry with paper towels instead. — USDA, Aug 2019

Roasting a whole bird at 325°F (USDA)

TURKEY	UNSTUFFED	STUFFED
8–12 lb	2¾–3 h	3–3½ h
12–14 lb	3–3¾ h	3½–4 h
14–18 lb	3¾–4¼ h	4–4¼ h
18–20 lb	4¼–4½ h	4¼–4¾ h
20–24 lb	4½–5 h	4¾–5¼ h

Approximate. Done means 165°F in the innermost thigh, the innermost wing and the thickest part of the breast, and in the center of any stuffing. Rest 20 minutes minimum before carving.



Wednesday, 11 pm. The turkey is "basically thawed." It is not.

HOW MUCH TURKEY

About 1 lb of whole turkey per person, more for leftovers. For 8: 12–14 lb. For 12: 16–18 lb, or two 10–12 lb birds spatchcocked on two sheet pans.

(!) THANKSGIVING · THE DAY

Thursday: one oven, one clock

425°F · 375°F · 350°F · warm · oven free

Sit-down 4:00 pm · 12–14 lb spatchcocked turkey

8:00		Coffee. Read this page once, top to bottom. The turkey stays in the fridge until 1:00.
10:00		Cook the stuffing vegetables if you didn't on Wednesday. Warm the stock. Chill the wine. Fill water pitchers.
12:00		Eat a real lunch. Assemble the stuffing in a buttered 9×13 dish; cover with foil.
12:30	425°F	Oven on to 425°F, racks lower-middle and upper-middle.
1:00		**Turkey in** (spatchcocked, on a rack over a sheet pan, 1 cup stock underneath).
1:45		Stuffing in on the top rack, covered. Uncover at 2:05.
2:10		First turkey temperature check. Potatoes into cold salted water; bring to a boil.
2:25		Stuffing out when the center reads 165°F. Foil back on.
2:30	375°F	**Turkey out** when breast, thigh and wing all read 165°F (usually 2:20–2:50). Tent loosely. Oven down to 375°F.
2:40		Green bean casserole in. Drippings into a fat separator. Potatoes drained, mashed, into the slow cooker on Warm.
3:00		Gravy base on low; whisk in the defatted drippings. Guests arrive. The cook gets a drink.
3:15		Fried onions on the casserole, 5 more minutes, then out. Stuffing back in, uncovered, to re-crisp.
3:25		Rolls in for 8–10 minutes. Gravy up to a boil.
3:35	warm	**Carve.** Rolls and stuffing out. Oven off, door shut: plates in to warm.
3:50		Everything to the table. One last taste of every dish for salt.
4:00		**Sit down.** Somebody else says something nice.
5:15	350°F	Optional: apple pie in at 350°F for 15 minutes. Coffee on. Pies out of the fridge.
6:00		Leftovers in the fridge (2 hours from serving). Carcass into a bag for Friday's soup.

WHOLE-BIRD VERSION

Roasting a whole, un-spatchcocked bird instead? At 325°F a 12–14 lb turkey takes 3 to 3¾ hours (USDA). Put it in at 11:00, bake the stuffing after it comes out, and keep everything else as above.

WHY THE LONG REST

The rest looks long. It is the trick: it frees the oven for every side, and very hot gravy goes over the sliced meat. A tented bird carves well after 30–60 minutes.