

A Thanksgiving Feast In Four Hours
By Diane Morgan

Here's how to pull off a flawless holiday dinner -- with all the trimmings -- while the turkey roasts

Menu: (Serves 8)

Assorted olives, herbed goat cheese with crostini, marinated artichokes

Butter-Rubbed, Cider-Glazed Roast Turkey

Dressing with Apples, Bacon, and Caramelized Onions

Puree of Yukon Gold Potatoes with Parmesan

Browned Brussels Sprouts with Hazelnuts & Lemon

Cranberry-Orange Relish with Ginger

Pumpkin & Ginger Pound Cake with Vanilla Ice Cream

Most Thanksgivings, you'll find me planning weeks in advance: it's by far my favorite holiday. But last year I was so busy that Thanksgiving became a hurried affair. I had remembered to order a turkey, but the big day crept up so quickly that I had only the day before to shop, and about four hours on Thanksgiving Day to cook. Amazingly, I pulled it off - turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, cranberry relish, and vegetables - the works.

Dinner was delicious, and I learned something: A full-fledged Thanksgiving doesn't require a huge amount of planning and cooking. The time crunch actually turned out to be an enjoyable challenge - a sort of marathon, with a bit of sweat at the brow but a great showing at the finish line. So get ready to impress everyone with a beautiful meal that takes only four hours to make.

The timetable will help you strategize, but here are more pointers so your blitz Thanksgiving comes off without a hitch.

Think ahead about dessert. You can bake the pound cake a few weeks before, or assign the recipe to a friend. For easy appetizers, but good cheese, olives, and other antipasto items from the grocery store. The night before, set the table and pull out serving platters, utensils, and glasses. And over tasks like peeling potatoes and arranging hors d'oeuvres to family and friends.

As soon as the turkey is in the oven, start chopping. Measure the ingredients for the rest of the recipes and put them in separate bowls. I set the measured ingredients for each dish on a rimmed baking sheet and stick the recipe on top; when it's time to get cooking, everything is at hand.

Finally, don't forget to have fun as you prepare this delicious meal. And let yourself revel in the triumph of having made a fabulous turkey dinner that takes just a bit longer to make than the average Thanksgiving Day football game.

Timetable:

2 weeks ahead: Order a fresh turkey. Make and freeze the cake (or assign the recipe to a guest)

1 or 2 days ahead: Make a grocery list and shop. Set the table. Pull out serving platters and utensils. If the turkey has been frozen, be sure it's thawed

4 hours ahead: Pull the turkey out of the refrigerator and heat the oven. Prepare the turkey. If the cake has been frozen, unwrap it and let it thaw.

3 1/2 hours ahead: Put the turkey in the oven. Assemble the dressing (but leave out the eggs and liquid until the last minute). Make the cranberry relish. Peel the potatoes.

2 hours ahead: Make the potato puree; keep warm over a warm water bath. Toast the hazelnuts and quarter the Brussels sprouts.

1 hour ahead: Finish assembling the dressing and put in to bake. Arrange the appetizers.

45 to 30 minutes before serving: Pull the turkey out of the oven and tent with foil to keep it warm. Make the gravy; keep warm. Cook the Brussels sprouts; keep warm. Put out appetizers as guests arrive.

Butter-Rubbed, Cider-Glazed Roast Turkey

Serves eight with ample seconds and leftovers, yields about 2 cups gravy.

Basting with cider during the last hour of roasting creates a sweet and beautiful bronze-glazed finish.

1 turkey (about 14 pounds), preferably fresh, completely thawed if frozen

2 teaspoons kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 medium yellow onions, quartered

6 cloves garlic

2 Golden Delicious apples (unpeeled), cored and quartered

6 sprigs fresh thyme

6 leaves fresh sage

1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted

3 cups apple cider

2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth; more if needed

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

Position a rack on the lowest level in the oven that will let you fit the turkey and still have room to bake the dressing. Heat the oven to 350° F. Have ready a large roasting pan with a roasting rack, preferably V-shaped, set in the pan.

Prepare the turkey: Remove the bag of giblets from the main and neck cavities of the bird and discard the liver. Set aside the neck, tail, gizzard, and heart. Rinse the turkey well and pat it dry with paper towels.

Season the chest cavity with some of the salt and a few grinds of pepper. Put 4 of the onion quarters, the garlic, the apples, 4 of the thyme sprigs, and 4 of the sage leaves in the chest cavity. Secure the legs under the flap of tail skin or tie them together. Bend the wingtips back behind the turkey, securing any loose neck skin underneath the wingtips.

Roast the Turkey: Brush the turkey with the butter. Season the turkey with the rest of the salt and more pepper. Put the turkey, breast side down, on the roasting rack. Scatter the remaining onion quarters and herbs in the roasting pan. Add the neck, tail, gizzard, and heart to the pan, along with 1 1/2 cups of the apple cider and 1 cup of the broth (you'll use the remaining cider for basting and the remaining chicken broth for the gravy). Roast for 30 minutes. Baste the turkey with the pan juices and roast another 30 minutes.

Remove the turkey from the oven. Using oven mitts covered with aluminum foil, or wads of paper towels, turn

the turkey breast side up. (The turkey won't be very hot at this point.) Baste with the pan juices return the turkey to the oven with the breast facing the opposite direction from the way it was (you will have flipped and rotated it). Roast for another 1 hour, basting occasionally.

After the turkey has roasted for 2 hours total, begin basting with the remaining apple cider every 30 minutes, rotating the position of the pan to brown the bird evenly. The turkey is done with an instant-read thermometer registers 170°F when inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. (When the internal temperature of a thigh is 155°F to 160°F, the turkey is about 30 minutes away from being done; a 14-pound unstuffed turkey takes about 3 hours.)

When the turkey is done, tilt it over the roasting pan to let the juices in the main cavity run into the pan. Transfer the turkey to a carving board or serving platter and tent it loosely with foil.

Let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes before carving.

Turkey Notes:

If you are like most people, you only cook a bird this big once a year. So to be sure you get it right, here are some tips and reminders.

If you have time the night before, brine the turkey. I haven't included brining in this recipe because of the extra time required - and this turkey tastes great without it. But brining is a great way to add flavor.

For even roasting and browning, rotate the turkey. I've given specific recipe instructions for when to do it. Even if you know your oven doesn't have hot spots, rotating is good insurance against uneven cooking.

Remember that roasting time will vary depending on the turkey's size. A 14-pound turkey is the ideal size for this menu's timetable since it will cook in about 3 hours at 350°F, and will yield more than enough meat for eight people. If you want to cook a bigger turkey, add about 15 minutes per pound to your mental timetable, but always use an instant-read thermometer to check for doneness.

If the turkey is browning too fast, tent it with foil. The cider you'll use for basting contains a bit of natural sugar, and this can accelerate browning. So as you baste, be sure to keep watch.

After you pull the turkey out of the oven, tent it with foil and let it rest. This gives the juices time to redistribute throughout the bird, and it buys you time to make the gravy and finish the side dishes.

While the turkey rests, make the gravy:

Discard the solids in the roasting pan and skim off as much fat as possible with a large spoon (tilting the pan makes this easier). Set the roasting pan over medium-high heat and bring the juices to a simmer. Using a wooden spoon, scrape and loosen any browned bits sticking to the bottom and sides of the pan. In a measuring cup, mix the flour with the remaining 1 cup chicken broth. Add the flour mixture to the pan and whisk until thickened, about 3 minutes. If the gravy gets too thick, thin it with more chicken broth until it reaches the consistency you like. Continue cooking and stirring for another 5 minutes to eliminate any raw flour flavor. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Strain into a gravy boat or a small bowl; keep warm until ready to serve.

Dressing with Apples, Bacon, and Caramelized Onions

Serves eight

A turkey roasts more evenly unstuffed, so I love to soak the stuffing - technically now a dressing - separately. If you're assembling this ahead, wait until just before baking to add the eggs and chicken broth. A metal baking pan tends to make this dressing cook more quickly.

Ingredients:

Butter for the pan

1 loaf (15 to 16 ounces) day-old rustic-style white bread

8 ounces sliced bacon, cut into 1-inch squares.
1 large onion, cut into a 1/2 -inch dice (about 1 1/2 cups)
1 tablespoon granulated sugar
2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 1/2-inch die(about 2 1/2 cups)
3 large ribs celery, chopped (about 1 1/2 cups)
2/3 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
1 tablespoon fresh thyme. Lightly chopped
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage
1 teaspoon kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
3 1/2 cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken broth
Butter a 9x13-inch baking pan. Cut the bread into 1-inch cubes and spread them on a baking sheet to dry at room temperature while you prepare the other ingredients.

In large skillet over medium heat, cook the bacon until crisp, about 15 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer the bacon to a plate lined with paper towels. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of fat from the skillet; reserve the extra. Put the onion on the pan and sauté it over medium-high heat until soft and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Sprinkle the sugar over the onion and sauté, stirring constantly to prevent sticking or burning, until the onion turns deep golden and the edges caramelize, 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape the onion into a large mixing bowl.

Return the pan to medium heat and add 2 tablespoons of the reserved bacon fat. Add the apples and celery. Sauté until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the parsley, thyme, sage, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, add a few grinds of pepper; sauté another 1 minute. Scrape the contents of the pan into the bowl with the onion.

When you're ready to bake the stuffing, add the bread cubes and bacon to the bowl of sautéed vegetables and toss. Add the beaten eggs, broth, the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, and a few more grinds of pepper; mix well. Transfer to the prepared baking pan.

Half an hour before the turkey is done (an instant-read thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh should read 155°F to 160°F), put the stuffing in the oven next to the turkey and bake uncovered at 350°F until the top is light and crusty, about 1 hour.

Puree of Yukon Gold Potatoes with Parmesan
Serves eight, with leftovers

I love the buttery texture and golden hue of Yukon Gold potatoes, and the Parmigiano here makes them special.

Ingredients:

8 large Yukon Gold potatoes (3 1/2 to 4 pounds total), peeled, quartered, and rinsed
2 teaspoons kosher salt; more to taste
1 1/2 cups milk; more if needed
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Put the quartered potatoes in a large saucepan with enough cold water to cover. Partially cover the pot and bring to a boil.

Uncover, add the salt, and reduce the heat so the water boils gently. Cook until the potatoes are tender when

pierced with a fork, 10 to 12 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the milk and cream on the stovetop or in a microwave until hot but not boiling. Drain the potatoes and return to the warm pan to dry the potatoes thoroughly. Use a potato masher, a ricer, or a food mill to mash the potatoes. Blend the butter and Parmigiano into the potatoes. Gradually add the milk mixture until the puree is as soft and moist as you like. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately or keep warm in the top of a double boiler (or in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water).

Cranberry-Orange Relish with Ginger

Yields 3 cups; serves eight

This ginger-tinged relish is tart - a perfect complement to the holiday bird. You can make it the day ahead, if you like.

Ingredients

1 package (12 ounces) fresh cranberries, picked over and stemmed

1 small navel orange, including the peel, cut into eighths

A generous 1/3 cup roughly chopped crystallized ginger

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

In a food processor, combine the cranberries, orange, crystallized ginger, sugar, and salt. Process until coarsely ground, stopping once or twice to scrape down the sides of the bowl. Transfer to a serving bowl, cover, and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Browned Brussels Sprouts with Hazelnuts & Lemon

Yields 4 cups, serves eight

This nutty, buttery take on Brussels sprouts is sure to win over even those who say they don't like them.

Ingredients

1/2 cup hazelnuts

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 pounds fresh Brussels sprouts, trimmed and quartered

Kosher salt

2 to 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Freshly ground black pepper

Toast the nuts on a baking sheet in a 350°F oven, stirring occasionally, until very fragrant and the skins are deep brown and cracked, about 15 minutes. Wrap the nuts in a clean dishtowel (one you don't mind staining); let steam for at least 5 minutes. Vigorously rub the nuts against one another in the towel to scrape off the skins (you won't get them all; aim for about half). Chop the nuts coarsely.

Heat a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, add the oil and butter. As soon as the butter melts, add the Brussels sprouts and spread evenly around the pan. Sprinkle with salt and cook without disturbing until browned on first side, about 3 minutes. Continue to cook, stirring the sprouts occasionally, until they're well browned all over, another 5 to 8 minutes. Add 1/4 cup water, cover partially, and cook until tender, another 4 to 5 minutes (if the water evaporates completely during cooking, add more, 2 tablespoons at a time). Don't overcook; the sprouts shouldn't be mushy. Add the nuts. Season to taste with the lemon juice, salt, and pepper. Serve immediately or keep warm for up to 20 minutes.

Pumpkin & Ginger Pound Cake

Serves eight, with ample leftovers

8 ounces (1 cup) unsalted butter, completely softened at room temperature; more for the pan

9 1/2 ounces (2 1/2 cups) cake flour; more for the pan

1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon table salt

1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

4 large eggs, at room temperature

2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

2 cups packed light brown sugar

1 cup unsweetened pumpkin puree

1/4 cup vegetable oil

2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger

1 to 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar for dusting

1 quart vanilla ice cream (optional)

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 10-inch tube pan or 12-cup bundt pan, preferably nonstick. Tap out any excess flour.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, ground ginger, nutmeg, and cloves; set aside. Separate the eggs, putting the yolks in a small bowl and the whites in a large mixing bowl.

Using a hand mixer or a stand mixer with the whisk attachment, cream the butter on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute.

With the mixer on low speed, gradually add the vanilla and the brown sugar, about 1/2 cup at a time. When all the brown sugar has been added, stop the mixer, scrape down the sides, and cream the mixture on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 to 4 minutes.

Use a fork to lightly beat the egg yolks; then, with the mixer on low speed, add them slowly to the butter-sugar mixture. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, increase the speed to medium, and beat for 1 minute. On low speed, add the pumpkin puree, oil, and fresh ginger. Beat until smooth.

Using a rubber spatula, stir in one-third of the flour mixture, and continue stirring just until the flour disappears (don't beat or overmix). Repeat, adding the remaining flour mixture in two more passes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl and set it aside.

Add a pinch of salt to the egg whites and beat with an electric mixer just until they hold soft peaks. Gently but thoroughly fold them into the batter. Spoon the batter into the prepared pan, spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Bake until the cake springs back when touched with a fingertip and a pick inserted into the center of the cake comes out mostly clean with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, 45 to 50 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool for 10 minutes. Carefully run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan. Invert the cake onto the cooling rack and gently remove the pan. Let cool completely. (If you're making the cake ahead, wrap it now) Just before serving, use a fine sieve to sift the confectioners' sugar over the cake. Cut into 3/4 -inch slices and serve with a scoop of ice cream, if you like.