

Top 10 Turkey Tips - How to Open Roast a Turkey Perfectly

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1. **Factor in thawing time!** If you're using a fresh turkey, this won't be an issue, but most people buy their turkeys frozen solid, and depending on the size, they can take quite a bit of time to thaw so be sure to plan for it. Never, ever, ever thaw your turkey on the countertop. Never. Thaw it unopened, breast side up, on a tray in the refrigerator - about 24 hours for every 4 pounds - or use the speed method, which is what I usually do since I don't buy my turkey that far in advance. To speed thaw, place the unopened turkey, breast side down in a sink and fill with cold tap water. Drain and change the water to fresh cool water about every 30 minutes or so - depending on how large it is. For a smaller turkey, 10 to 18 pounds, it'll take about 3 to 4 days in the fridge, 5 to 9 hours with the speed thaw method. For a larger turkey, 22 to 24 pounds, it'll take about 6 days in the fridge, or about 12 hours with the speed method. Once thawed, store in the fridge until you're ready to cook it!

2. **Brine.** Your. Turkey. Learn the [science behind brining](#) and why you should do it, and check out [my brining formula](#) while you're at it. Buy the [large turkey brining bags](#), or [a kit](#), and if you don't have room in your fridge, you *can* use a small cooler - just a little bit bigger than your bird - so long as you keep plenty of ice on hand. You must keep the temperature at 40 degrees or less, so keep a thermometer in the cooler, and check it frequently. Fill several large zippered storage bags with ice and load them in with the turkey and the brining solution, so that you don't dilute your brine - refresh them as often as needed! My brining recipe is not cooked, but many are. If you use a cooked version you must cool it and refrigerate it overnight. Do not put the turkey into a brine that is not well chilled. When you are done with the brine, rinse the turkey well, inside and out, place it into a pan and let it sit, uncovered in the fridge overnight to dry. Take into consideration any salt injection your turkey may have and base whether to brine on the percentage listed. Be sure that you rinse it well before roasting.

3. **Truss.** Trussing makes the bird more compact, helps it to keep its shape and cook more evenly, and makes it easier to carve. Even if you simply truss the legs and tuck the wings up underneath, it makes a big difference. Find out more [about trussing here](#).

4. **Stuff the Turkey ... with Aromatics.** People have gotten fearful of stuffing a turkey with dressing anymore, but I have never been fearful of it really. We grew up on it and not one of us ever got sick from it. If you don't want to stuff, definitely use some aromatics inside the cavity of your turkey. Salt (skip if you've brined) and pepper the insides first, then stuff with a couple of lemons, cut in half or sliced, some fresh rosemary, and smashed garlic cloves. Some people stuff with onion and seasonal fruits - like apples and oranges, instead.

5. **Inject flavor.** This has become a big trend, mostly for fried turkeys but also for open roasted turkeys because it infuses extra flavor right into the turkey meat. Make up your own injecting formula, or simply [purchase a kit](#) that includes the injector and the seasoning.

Source: <http://deepsouthdish.com>

6. **High heat at the beginning.** [Alton Brown's](#) roast turkey (14 to 16 pound sized) recipe starts the turkey off in a very hot 500 degree oven for 30 minutes, and then reduces the heat down to 350 degrees for the remaining roasting time - about 2 to 2-1/2 hours for that size bird. I have done this method (though not quite that hot) and it works well. Michael Symon does his (10 pound) turkey at 425 for about 45 minutes, then reduces it down to 375 degrees F for about 15 to 20 minutes longer per pound. Anne Burrell goes for 450 degrees F for about 45 minutes (with her 12 to 14 pound turkey), then lowers to 350 degrees for the remaining time, about 17 minutes per pound.

7. **Coat the turkey.** You can use vegetable oil, canola oil, or butter, but most of us prefer butter. Season the butter with a bit of fresh cracked black pepper, or really whatever you like. Pat the turkey dry, carefully lift the skin around the breast area and smear butter up under the skin and all over the top of the skin everywhere. Martha Stewart likes to use a wine and butter drenched cheesecloth that is draped over the breast meat and is then constantly basted - at least every 30 minutes - to keep it from drying out. Don't let the cheesecloth dry out if you use this method, because it will stick to the skin and tear the skin away. The cheesecloth is very carefully removed during the final 1/3 of the cooking time and the turkey basted. I prefer the simple butter smear, no cheesecloth. Some people also like to rub Cajun seasoning on top of the turkey after buttering but keep in mind that the seasonings tend to darken during the roasting process (think blackened if you will) so keep that in mind as far as presentation goes if you choose to use it. I think [an injection of Cajun seasoning](#) is the better way to go.

8. **Frequent basting.** While the turkey is roasting, I love to baste it about every 30 minutes. It really transforms the color. Do it right in the oven, rather than removing the turkey, if possible, but quickly so you won't lose your oven heat! Turn the roasting pan several times during the course of basting just to insure more even roasting.

9. **Cover the breast meat at the end.** During the last 1/3 of the roasting period, very loosely tent only the breast meat with a piece of aluminum foil. This will help to shield the breast meat and prevent it from overcooking while the darker meat continues to cook. Some folks start their turkey out breast side down and then turn it over near the last 1/3 or so of the cooking time and swear that it keeps the breast meat moist. I tried it before but found it too awkward and I feel the brining has that covered now anyway.

10. **Ignore the pop up timer and use a thermometer.** Period. If you are trying to roast a turkey without one of these - either an [instant read thermometer](#) or a [digital probe thermometer](#) - or if you are, heaven forbid, going by the pop up timer, you are more likely than not, overcooking your turkey. A probe can be inserted and left in the turkey and will let you know when it reaches temperature. Otherwise, use an instant read thermometer and begin checking the temperature about a half hour before the anticipated time. The turkey is done when an instant read thermometer inserted into thickest part of the thigh meat reads right at about 180 degrees. Loosely tent the turkey and let it rest - it will continue cooking for a bit.

These are just a few of the tips and tricks I've picked up over the years. Do you have any tricks of your own to achieve a perfect, moist turkey?

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