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Chef Kevin Keating, CEC,CCE/Keiser University

Cook your masterpiece thanks to the turkey tips

By Kati Schardl
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Does the thought of whipping up a Thanksgiving feast fill you with trepidation? Are you haunted by the ghosts of Turkey Day debacles past?

Fear not! Tallahassee is blessed with a host of culinary experts available for consultation on holiday dining matters. We posed some of the questions uppermost in the minds of those girding their loins to prepare the Thanksgiving meal to one of them — Chef Kevin Keating, dean and program director of culinary arts for Keiser University since 1998.

He answered our queries with good humor and wisdom and even offered to share a few recipes.



Cooking the turkey covered keeps it moister; cooking without a cover makes for a brown, crispy skin, but requires more basting. (Butterball/The Associated Press)

Q: Is there a fool-proof way to get a succulent, nicely browned bird?

A: The way to ensure that the bird stays juicy is to go through a procedure called barding, which is putting a fat such as bacon or fatback underneath the skin of the turkey before it goes in the oven. As it roasts, the bird self-bastes and that keeps the white meat from drying out. You can also put fresh herbs such as thyme or basil with the fat under the skin. You could use butter instead of bacon or fatback, but it melts away much faster and you would have to do more hand-basting during the cooking process. The barding method ensures that the turkey skin gets really crisp, as well.

Q: Some people cook their turkeys in special bags, and others tent the bird in foil. Should the turkey be cooked covered or uncovered?

A: It really depends on how you want your bird to turn out. Anytime you cover the turkey, whether in a bag or in foil or in a covered roasting pan, you're changing the cooking method from roasting to braising. The difference is in the moisture and crispness of the skin. A lot of people like to do a partial cooking where you roast the bird for the first half of the time to let the skin get nice and brown, then cover it with foil or a lid to braise it and keep it moist. To get the really crispy skin, though, you have to roast it uncovered from start to finish and either use the barding method or do a lot of hand-basting.

Q: What's the most common mistake people make when cooking a turkey?

A: People overcook the bird, pure and simple. The turkey is done when you check the internal temperature of the thickest part of the bird — usually, the thigh — and the thermometer reads 170 degrees. Turkey generally takes about 20 minutes per pound to cook thoroughly without drying out. Some people err on the side of caution and end up overcooking the turkey, so that it dries out and is stringy and difficult to carve.

Q: How long should the turkey rest before carving?

A: It depends on the size of the bird — the bigger the bird, the longer it needs to rest. Say you've got an 18-pound turkey —when it comes out of the oven, it should rest on the counter for about 25 minutes. Look for an accumulation of clear, running juices that collect in the bottom of the platter. That's a good indicator that the meat has rested sufficiently.

Q: What sort of turkey do you prefer — fresh or frozen?

A: A good, fresh turkey is fine with me. It doesn't necessarily have to be a free-range or organic bird, but a fresh turkey will offer a good eating bird and will have the best flavor. Most supermarkets will have them available now.

Q: Is there a perfect size of turkey for the average holiday feast?

A: The ideal size for most families is a 12-pound bird. You've got plenty of meat on there, it's big enough so that it looks nice on the table as the centerpiece, it fits in everyone's oven, and it's a manageable size to carve and still have leftovers.

Q: Do you prefer to cook the dressing in the bird or separately? (Note: If you live north of the Mason-Dixon Line, you call it stuffing. South of the line, it's called dressing, according to Chef Keating.)

A: If you're going to leave the bread (component) out, I prefer to put the dressing in the bird —I'll put vegetables, fruits, nuts and other ingredients in there with no bread element, which packs in there really tight. I make the (breaded) dressing separately, usually an oyster or sausage dressing.

Q: What's the best way to store leftover turkey —on the bone or sliced?

A: It depends on what your plans are for the leftovers. If you're using it to make turkey sandwiches, slice it all off the bone that day — it's easier to cut and you get more meat off when it's still warm. If you're going to make turkey soup, leave the meat on the bone and cook it all together for the soup. You'll get more flavor.

Q: What's your favorite way to eat leftover turkey?

A: In a sandwich!

Grilled Turkey & Prosciutto Panini with Cranberry-Mascarpone

3 oz. turkey breast, cooked

1 oz. prosciutto, sliced thin

1 cup frozen cranberries

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup water

1 cup mascarpone, softened

1/2 cup dried cranberries

2 slices 7-grain bread

2 Tbsps. butter

Cook frozen cranberries, sugar and water for 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.

Line a cookie sheet with plastic wrap. Spread mascarpone over the plastic wrap.

Approximately 1 inch from the top edge of the cheese, spoon the cooked cranberries in a line parallel to the top of the cheese. Salt and pepper to taste, if desired.

Proceed to roll in a jelly-roll fashion until the cheese begins to resemble a log. Roll the log in the dried cranberries. Wrap tightly and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Layer the turkey and prosciutto onto the bread. Unwrap the cheese and cut two 1-inch slices from the log. Layer on top of prosciutto and top sandwich with the remaining slice of bread.

In a saute pan, melt half of the butter. Add assembled sandwich and grill until golden.

Remove sandwich from pan. Add remaining butter and allow it to melt. Return sandwich to pan, uncooked side down. Grill until golden.

Suggested garnishes: Sliced tomatoes, sweet pickles, fresh spinach, homemade or store-bought potato chips.

Substitutions: Deli or spiral-cut ham can substitute for the prosciutto. Cranberry sauce or cranberry relish can substitute for frozen cranberries. Cream cheese can substitute for mascarpone.

Serves 1.

Sausage Parmesan Dressing

1 lb. ground breakfast sausage

1 cup celery, diced

1 onion, diced

1 green pepper, diced

1 sour apple, diced

1/2 tsp. thyme

1/2 tsp. marjoram

1/2 tsp. sage

1 tsp. black pepper

1 tsp. salt (adjust salt for cheese, if necessary)

8 to 9 cups bread crumbs, coarsely chopped

3 to 4 cups turkey stock

1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Saute and brown sausage to release fat. Add vegetables and apple to sausage and lightly cook to release their flavors.

Add herbs, spices and salt to the saute pan and cook for 1 minute.

Remove all ingredients from saute pan and add to bread crumbs. Toss so that all ingredients are evenly mixed.

Add stock to desired amount of moisture. Mix in Parmesan cheese if dressing is to be added to the bird and roasted immediately. If dressing is to be made into a casserole and baked later, place cheese on top of casserole and refrigerate. Bake at 325 degrees for about an hour.

Winter Corn Salad with Sage Vinaigrette

2 cups frozen corn, thawed

1/4 cup chopped red pepper

2 Tbsps. white wine vinegar

1/4 cup olive oil

1 tsp. sage

1/2 tsp. rosemary

Pinch kosher salt

Fresh cracked pepper to taste

Combine corn and red pepper in a bowl. Set aside.

In another bowl, combine sage, rosemary and vinegar with a whisk. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil while whisking.

Pour over corn and red pepper. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

— *All recipes from Chef Kevin Keating*