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## Turkey 101

Thanksgiving will be here before we know it! Are you ready? Planning is one of the key things that will make your dinner a success! Now is a great time to make your menu, check to see what you need from the grocery store that can be frozen or put in pantry and will not perish between now and Thanksgiving.

Already, you should be seeing bargains on turkey and the fixings. Be sure to look and see how your storage space is. One of our local stores had turkeys on sale for .49 cents a pound, we had the room, so we purchased two of them. One for Thanksgiving and one later in the wintertime.

Be sure to allow enough time for your turkey to safely thaw before preparing the bird. Birds weight 4-12 pounds need 1-3 days in the refrigerator, birds 12-16 pounds need 3-4 days, birds 16-20 pounds need 4-5 days and birds 20-24 pounds need 5-6 days in the refrigerator. You will want to be sure to have your refrigerator cleaned and enough space for the bird to be placed on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator. You can thaw birds in cold water. Be sure to keep the water below 40 degrees Fahrenheit and place bird in leak proof plastic bag to prevent cross-contamination and to prevent bird from absorbing water. When cooking the bird, be sure to set your oven temperature to no lower than 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove the giblet packet before baking. Place turkey breast-side up on a rack. It is not recommended to stuff your turkey as you want be certain your bird cooks thoroughly. If you choose to stuff your turkey, it is important to follow food safety guidelines in order to keep everyone safe. Keep wet and dry ingredients separate if you prepare ingredients ahead of time. Chill all the wet ingredients (butter/margarine,

cooked celery and onions, broth, etc.). Mix wet and dry ingredients just before filling the turkey cavities. Fill the cavities loosely. Cook the turkey immediately. Use a food thermometer to make sure the center of the stuffing reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

### **Unstuffed Turkey Cooking Times**

| <b>Size</b>            | <b>Time</b>    |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 4 to 8 pounds (breast) | 1½ to 3¼ hours |
| 8 to 12 pounds         | 2¾ to 3 hours  |
| 12 to 14 pounds        | 3 to 3¾ hours  |
| 14 to 18 pounds        | 3¾ to 4¼ hours |
| 18 to 20 pounds        | 4¼ to 4½ hours |
| 20 to 24 pounds        | 4½ to 5 hours  |

### **Stuffed Turkey Cooking Times**

| <b>Size</b>            | <b>Time</b>    |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 6 to 8 pounds (breast) | 2½ to 3½ hours |
| 8 to 12 pounds         | 3 to 3½ hours  |

For mor information about the safe preparation of turkey, please visit

<https://food.unl.edu/article/turkey-101> You may also reach me at [raae.aspen@unl.edu](mailto:raae.aspen@unl.edu) or at my office phone number, 308-236-1235. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!