

Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore County

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Happy Thanksgiving!

Last week I provided tips for holiday gatherings during the COVID-19 era and ways to stay engaged even if in a virtual setting. One thing that doesn't have to look different is some of the traditional holiday foods. Trade recipes with family members so you can learn to make that special dish that someone normally brings. If the dish is too large, only make half of the recipe. Worried that a turkey will be too big for your family? Consider making a large one and freeze it so you have meals ready to go for other times.

The American Farm Bureau Federation annually calculates the cost of a Thanksgiving meal to serve 10 people with plenty for leftovers. This year, with a traditional Thanksgiving meal, Farm Bureau estimated a meal total of \$46.90 which is less than \$2.00 from last year. This is largely due to retail turkey prices being the lowest since 2010. Included in the meal is a 16-lb. turkey, bread stuffing, sweet potatoes, rolls with butter, peas, cranberries, a relish tray of carrots and celery, pumpkin pie with whipped cream and beverages of coffee and milk. You can thank our American farmers and ranchers who are able to provide us the bounty of safe and affordable food we are able to consume even through a pandemic. Another interesting fact about Thanksgiving include that 88% of Americans are expected to be feasting on turkey for Thanksgiving this year (National Turkey Federation).

Now let's talk trivia:

Q: Why are turkeys raised? A: Because of their excellent quality of meat and eggs

Q: What is a male turkey called? A: Tom

Q: What is a female turkey called? A: A Hen

Q: What sound do turkeys make? A: Only tom turkeys gobble; the female makes a clucking sound.

Q: How many feathers does a turkey have at maturity? A: 3,500 feathers

Q: How big was the heaviest turkey ever raised? A: 86 pounds, about the size of a large dog

Q: Which gender of turkeys are usually consumed whole? A: Hens (females) are usually sold as whole birds. Toms (males) are processed into turkey sausage, turkey franks, tenderloins, cutlets and deli meats.

Q: How long does it take a turkey to reach market size? A: Hens usually grow for 16 weeks and is 8-16 lbs. when processed while tom usually takes 19 weeks to reach market weight and weighs 24 lbs. Large toms (24-40 lbs. are a few weeks older.

Regardless of what you do this Thanksgiving, remember to be thankful for what really matters and stay safe this year.

Christmas Tree Selection

Extension horticulturist, Nicole Stoner shared some tips on selecting the perfect live Christmas tree. If you have heavy ornaments, consider a Fraser Fir, Scotch pine, blue spruce or Black Hills spruce because they have stiff branches that hold ornaments better. If you'd like a Christmas tree scent, consider a Balsam Fir. If you prefer softer needles, go with a White pine.

Stoner also said, when choosing your tree, assess the tree condition. Walk around the tree to look for holes in the branching. Slightly tug on the needles that are on the tree to ensure they are tightly attached to the tree and have some flexibility. Also, give the tree a good shake, if green needles fall off or if it has a lighter green color that is not a fresh tree, choose another. Brown needles will naturally fall from the interior of the tree, that doesn't mean there is a problem with it.

Finally, she provides some tips for home care of a real tree. When you take your tree home, place it immediately into the tree stand with plenty of water. If the tree was cut within the past 12 hours it



doesn't need to be recut but if it has to sit longer than 12 hours prior to placing it in the stand, it will need to be recut to improve water uptake. Place the tree in a stand that holds at least 1 gallon of water and be sure to add water daily. Research has shown that additives and water alternatives are not as effective as plain water in maintaining a tree through the holiday season.

Keep the tree away from sources of heat to reduce water consumption and help reduce fire hazards. Christmas trees rarely start fires in our homes, but they need to be watered to help them retain their color and keep your floor from getting too messy from fallen needles.