Just smell the turkey basting in the oven, the dressing, mashed potatoes & gravy, and of course the distinct odor of pumpkin pie. It’s turkey time! I can picture it now! Up early to put the turkey in the oven, back to bed, up again, peeling potatoes, putting the dressing made the night before in the oven, setting the roll dough out to rise, putting the green bean casserole together. Salads and pies made, just need to let the rolls rise and bake them so they come out hot from the oven when ready to eat.

We changed the calendar this week to November, which means Thanksgiving is just around the corner! If you are the lucky person that gets to host the Thanksgiving dinner for your family, now is the time to begin planning for that holiday meal.

**Purchasing the Turkey**

**Fresh or frozen?** There is no quality difference between a fresh or frozen turkey although fresh turkeys have shorter shelf lives. By purchasing a frozen turkey, you can get the turkey in advance and take advantage of special sales. Fresh turkeys provide convenience because they do not require thawing.

**What size turkey do I need to buy?** When purchasing a whole turkey, purchase at least one pound of uncooked turkey per person. You'll have enough for the feast and for leftovers too.

**When should I buy it?** Keep in mind that a whole turkey takes about 24 hours per four to five pounds to thaw in the refrigerator. (For example: A 15-pound frozen bird will take 3 to 4 full days to thaw in the refrigerator.) Ideally, purchase your frozen turkey as far in advance as necessary to safely thaw it in the refrigerator. If buying a fresh turkey, purchase it only 1 to 2 days before the meal and keep it refrigerated.

**Handling the turkey**

Always wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling the turkey.

**How should I thaw a frozen turkey?** Never defrost a turkey on the counter! A turkey should be thawed in the refrigerator. The refrigerator method is the safest and will result in the best finished product. Leave the bird in the original packaging and place in a shallow pan and allow refrigerator thawing time at a rate of 4 to 5 pounds per 24 hours. Forgot to get the turkey out in time to thaw completely in the refrigerator? To thaw in cold water, keep turkey in the original packaging, place in a clean and sanitized sink or pan and submerge in cold water. Change the cold water every 30 minutes. The turkey will take about 30 minutes per pound to thaw. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze.

**Now what?** Once thawed, remove neck and giblets from the body cavities and keep bird refrigerated at 40 °F or below until it is ready to be cooked. Next week we will continue with how to cook the turkey.

Remember bacteria never takes a holiday, so it's important to be mindful this Thanksgiving of the four core messages of food safety in preparing your holiday meal - clean, separate, cook, and chill.

“Knowledge for Life” provided by Phillips-Rooks Extension District #5 and K-State Research and Extension.

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