

How To Create a Thanksgiving Holiday

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Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that is easily overlooked for its importance. Growing up, my Thanksgiving meant burnt food at Grandma's and the adults gathered around the television to watch football and sleep. The significance of the holiday was lost. Other households remember Thanksgiving as the day before the big sales and many children see it as another day off from school.

Whether you want to demonstrate the significance of Thanksgiving to your family, create a tradition that your children will remember all their lives, or you simply want to spice up your already wonderful holiday traditions this report is for you.

Food is of course the main focus of the Thanksgiving Day holiday and we'll of course offer some easy and tasty recipes. In addition to food, Thanksgiving can be a time to get your entire family involved in the planning. Older children can create fantastic food, crafts, and ideas to celebrate the holiday. Younger children can get involved too. To add a bit of lighthearted humor, there's even a guide on how to avoid Thanksgiving disasters!

Let's get started!

Thanksgiving Menus:

No Thanksgiving is complete without a turkey, right? Generally that's the way that many American's feel. However, many smaller families do not like to make an entire turkey, nor do mothers enjoy spending 48 hours pinned to their kitchens. We have included a traditional menu, a menu for smaller families, and a vegetarian turkey menu that doesn't involve tofu turkey!

Traditional Menu:

- Maple Roasted Turkey
- Sage Sausage and Apple Dressing
- Sugary Yams
- Cranberry Relish
- Old Fashioned Pumpkin Pie

Turkey: In a small mixing bowl, whisk together the 1 cup of maple syrup and 1/4 cup hot water until it becomes a thin glaze. Following your turkey's cooking guidelines, use this glaze to baste the turkey every 30 minutes. If the legs or breast brown too quickly because of the sugar content, cover them with foil. When your turkey is done, transfer it to a cutting board and let rest for about 20 minutes before carving.

Stuffing: This stuffing is a classic and you may very well have an old family recipe already. The best recipes use fresh sage sausage, casing removed, and apples like Gravenstein, Rome or Golden delicious. It is generally advised to make your stuffing separate from the turkey and serve it on the side rather than to actually stuff your turkey with the stuffing before you cook it. This eliminates much of the risk of food borne illness.

Sugary Yams: Traditional yam or sweet potato recipes call for tons of brown sugar mixed with sweet potatoes and topped with marshmallows. For a slightly healthier twist on the traditional, mix your yams or sweet potatoes with a tablespoon or two of butter and real maple syrup to taste. Skip the marshmallows!

Cranberry Relish: This is a quick and easy recipe that I love. It marries the flavors of cranberry and orange for a delightful zing. Mix 1 pound of cranberries (fresh or frozen), ½ cup of sugar, 1 tbs of

orange juice and 1 tsp of orange zest into a food processor. Pulse until the mixture is blended but still chunky. Cover and let sit until you're ready to serve.

Traditional Pumpkin Pie: It is likely that you already have a favorite pumpkin pie recipe. This recipe uses pre-made crust to make the job easier and fool proof. Prepare your crust per the package indications. Pour your filling into prepared crust and cook for 45 minutes in a 350 degree preheated oven.

Mix together:

- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 2 cups canned pumpkin
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 egg plus 2 egg yolks, slightly beaten
- 1 cup half-and-half
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice

Small Gathering Menu:

- Cranberry Glazed Turkey Breast
- Whipped Mashers
- Sautéed Green Beans
- Spicy Greens Salad

Turkey Glaze: Blend the ingredients in your food processor until the mixture resembles a glaze. Place mixture into a saucepan and bring to a boil. Let simmer for 5 minutes, strain and allow cooling.

- 12-ounce bag of cranberries
- 2 teaspoons orange zest
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1 1/4 cups water
- 1/4 cup Grand Marnier – optional

Cook your turkey breast until it is almost done. Cooking time depends on the size of the breasts. When you have about 30 minutes left and your turkey breast is beginning to brown, glaze the breast with 1/3 cup of the cranberry glaze. Cook the turkey until it reached an internal temperature of 165 – 179 degrees. Transfer to a cutting board and let it rest. Serve the carved breast with the remaining glaze.

Spicy Greens Salad: Mix together your favorite spicy fresh greens. Consider arugula, escarole and mustard greens. Simmer 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil and 1 clove of minced garlic in a pan over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes. Let cool, whisk 1/3 cup balsamic vinegar into the oil and garlic mixture, salt and pepper to taste. Lightly dress greens and enjoy!

Vegetarian Menu:

- Potato and Pumpkin Pie
- Spicy Greens Salad
- Sourdough Dinner Rolls

Pumpkin and Potato Pie: Begin by roasting a 3 pound pumpkin, seeded and halved and 2 large russet potatoes also halved in a 400 degree oven for one hour. Let cool and dice pumpkin and potatoes into 1/2 inch cubes. You can make the pie dough yourself or buy premade deep-dish piecrust. Prepare the crust as indicated on the package. Sautee 2 cups of chopped onions, 2 minced cloves of garlic and 1 1/2 cups of corn in 1 tbs of olive oil. Mix potatoes, pumpkin and sautéed onion mixture together. Add 2 cups of Monterey jack cheese and 1 tsp of dried thyme, salt and pepper to taste. Spoon mixture into piecrust and bake at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

Activities for Older Children:

Expressions of Gratitude

Ask your children to create a gratitude list to share at the table. Invite them to be creative in their expression of it. They can print it, write a story, put on a play or even sing a song. As parents, it is important to also participate in the exercise. Create your own gratitude list and be prepared to share it with your family.

Family Tree

Ask your older children to create a family tree. This project can take several days and may require your assistance. The Internet is a great tool for heritage and family information. Connecting with the past helps children to define who they are, who they want to be, and appreciate the essence of family.

Dinner Plans

Involve your older children with the mealtime planning. Have them choose a recipe, shop for it and follow through on the preparation. Ask them to put some thought into the process and choose a recipe that they would want to make every year – establish a tradition. Remember, boys can cook too!

Charity Begins at Home

Ask your children to devise a way to give back to the community and then support them on the follow through. Ideas can be as straightforward as volunteering at the local homeless shelter to more creative and complicated ideas like raising money for a charity that speaks to them.

Environmentally Grateful

Your children are aware of their impact on the earth. They're being brought up at school and via their peers to be aware of recycling, water conservation, and energy and fuel conservation. Get your children involved in making this holiday and each subsequent holiday an environmentally friendly holiday. Have them come up with ideas to be responsible and ask them to follow through.

Activities for Younger Children

Wreath of Gratitude

Younger children are capable of profound thought and gratitude. Ask the wee ones to create a wreath of their handprints in colorful fall shades. You may need to help them write down their thoughts on each handprint but the end result will be a fantastic table decoration and an expression of your child's views of the world.

Place Cards

If your children are too young to set the table for a holiday meal, have them participate in the table setting duties by making holiday themed place cards. Sit them down at the kitchen table give them myriad tools and resources to let their imaginations soar like a turkey. Okay so turkeys waddle but you get the picture. Allow them free reign and creativity over the process. If your child needs structure and guidance, give them a pre cut turkey, leaf or cornucopia to decorate.

Table Centerpiece

Modeling clay is fantastically fun, safe, and inexpensive. Grab a variety of colors and ask your young ones to create a masterpiece for the table. Give them feathers, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, felt feet and what ever else you can think of and let your little ones have fun. You can also use foam balls or semi circles as a base.

Putting On a Play

Ask young children to dress up and tell the story of Thanksgiving, as they know it. Don't be surprised if they come up with an entirely new story full of princesses, dragons and young wizards. Make sure to keep your recorder handy, if the play becomes a tradition you'll have documented years of fun filled family events.

Thanksgiving Disaster 101

Many of the Thanksgiving disasters center around cooking the turkey. The thought of placing a 15 pound bird in your oven sends many people to their local grocery for a cooked version – rarely a tasty solution, or to their neighborhood restaurant.

The USDA offers the following turkey thawing and cooking guidelines:

Thawing Your Turkey: There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely — in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave oven. In the refrigerator (40 °F or below), allow approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds. Keep the turkey in its original wrapper. Place it on a tray or in a pan to catch any juices that may leak. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days. If necessary, a turkey that has been properly thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen.

Roasting Your Turkey: Set your oven temperature no lower than 325 °F. Place your turkey or turkey breast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook turkey to higher temperatures.

Smoking, frying, grilling, and otherwise cooking your turkey: There are a number of ways to cook a turkey and in an attempt to find easier and tastier ways to cook a turkey. These easier and tastier ways often lead to extreme accidents. The instance of household fires related to turkey fryers is proof enough. Regardless of how you plan on cooking your turkey this year, the important thing is to pay attention. Nearly 100% of the accidents, injuries, and downright awful turkeys result from people walking away from their turkey and not paying attention.

Another difficult Thanksgiving task, besides putting up with your in-laws, is gravy. Prepared gravy from the store just doesn't taste good and making gravy can be a lumpy singed mess.

Lumpy Gravy can be resolved by pouring it through a strainer into a clean pan and reheating.

Burnt gravy can occasionally be rescued by pouring the gravy into a new pan, careful not to scrape the burnt stuff off of the bottom of the old pan. The majority of the burnt taste should stay with the old pan.

After the Meal

In order to avoid the football induced turkey laden slumber that my family used to partake in, plan a few after dinner events to keep people active and enjoying the holiday. It can be as simple as a walk around the neighborhood to get the blood flowing and the turkey digesting. You can also engage your family in a game. Pictionary, Trivial Pursuit, and several card games are designed to involve as many players as you have available.

If games and walks aren't your thing, what about a round of touch football at your nearby park?

The point is to stay active after dinner. Dishes can wait, the NFL can wait, and the couch can wait. This is a day to spend with your family being grateful for each other. Thanksgiving is a day to spend together, living, laughing and loving.

Happy Thanksgiving!