

Turkey & Poultry Cooking Times & Tips

Defrosting your turkey

If your turkey is frozen, make sure it's properly defrosted before you cook it. If it's still partially frozen, recommended cooking times won't be long enough to cook it thoroughly. This means bacteria that cause food poisoning could survive the cooking process. So, before you start cooking, make sure there aren't any ice crystals in the cavity. You could also test the thicker parts of the turkey with a fork, to tell whether the meat feels frozen.

It's very important to work out defrosting time in advance, so you know how much time to allow – it can take at least a couple of days for a large turkey to thaw (see the estimated times below or use our handy guide).

What to do

When you start defrosting, take the turkey out of its packaging, put it on a large dish and cover. The large dish is to hold the liquid that comes out as the turkey thaws. Remove the giblets and the neck as soon as possible, because this speeds up thawing.

Put the dish in a cool, clean place (ideally the fridge) where the turkey won't touch other foods. If it isn't possible to defrost your turkey in the fridge, you could use a cool room, or a garage. Remember that the temperature of the place where the turkey is kept will affect thawing times.

If you're defrosting your turkey somewhere cold, such as the garage or garden shed, watch out for sudden extremes in temperature, if it gets very cold (or very warm), this could mean the turkey won't defrost properly or won't be kept cold enough. Keep the turkey covered and make sure that pets and young children are kept away.

You could also defrost it at room temperature, but make sure it doesn't touch or drip onto other foods.

How long to defrost

To work out the defrosting time for your turkey, check the packaging. If there aren't any defrosting instructions, use the following times (or our Turkey defrosting guide) to work out roughly how long it will take to thaw your turkey, but remember to check that it's fully thawed before cooking.

In a fridge at 4°C (39°F), allow about 10 to 12 hours per kg, but remember not all fridges will be this temperature.

In a cool room (below 17.5°C, 64°F) allow approximately 3 to 4 hours per kg, longer if the room is particularly cold.

At room temperature (about 20°C, 68°F) allow approximately 2 hours per kg.

When your turkey is fully defrosted, put it in the fridge until you are ready to cook it. If this isn't possible make sure you cook it immediately.

Preparing poultry

It's very important to keep raw poultry away from food that is ready to eat. This is because if raw poultry, or other raw meat, touches (or drips onto) these foods, bacteria will spread.

Remember, bacteria can also spread from raw meat and poultry to worktops, chopping boards, dishes and utensils. So, to keep your Christmas food safe, remember to do the following things:

Always wash your hands with warm water and soap, and dry them thoroughly, after touching raw poultry.

Don't wash your turkey (or other poultry) – this is because bacteria can splash onto worktops, dishes and other foods. Proper cooking will kill any bacteria, so you don't need to wash poultry.

Always clean worktops, chopping boards, dishes and utensils thoroughly after they have touched raw poultry.

Never use the same chopping board for raw poultry and ready-to-eat food without washing it thoroughly in warm soapy water. (If possible, use a separate chopping board just for raw meat and poultry).

Always keep raw poultry away from other foods.

Store raw poultry at the bottom of the fridge so it can't drip onto other foods.

Cooking poultry

It's very important to plan your cooking time in advance, to make sure you get the bird in the oven early enough to cook it thoroughly. A large turkey can take several hours to cook properly.

How to check your bird is cooked

These cooking guidelines are only estimates; always check that the bird is properly cooked before serving, because eating undercooked turkey (or other poultry) could cause food poisoning.

These are the three main ways to tell if poultry is cooked:

1. The meat should be piping hot all the way through.
2. When you cut into the thickest part of the meat, none of the meat should be pink.
3. If juices run out when you pierce the turkey, or when you press the thigh, they should be clear.

How long to cook

These cooking times are based on an unstuffed bird. It's better to cook your stuffing in a separate roasting tin, rather than inside the bird, so it will cook more easily and cooking guidelines will be more accurate. (If you cook your bird with the stuffing inside, you will need to allow extra time for the amount of stuffing and allow for the fact that it cooks more slowly.)

Remember some ovens, such as fan-assisted ovens, might cook the bird more quickly so check the manufacturer's handbook for your oven if you can. Always check that the meat is cooked thoroughly before serving.

As a general guide, in an oven preheated to 180°C (350°F, Gas Mark 4):

- for a turkey under 4.5kg, allow 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes
- for a turkey weighing between 4.5kg and 6.5kg, allow 40 minutes per kg
- for a turkey over 6.5kg, allow 35 minutes per kg

Tip: Cover your turkey with foil during cooking and uncover for the last 30 minutes to brown the skin. To stop the meat drying out, baste it every hour during cooking.

Cooking times for other birds

Other birds, such as goose and duck, need different cooking times and temperatures. The oven should always be hotter for duck and goose to melt the fat under the skin.

Goose should be cooked in a preheated oven at 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7 for 35 minutes per kg.

Tip: Pierce the skin before cooking to help drain the fat and pour away any excess fat halfway through cooking.

Duck should be cooked in a preheated oven for 45 minutes per kg at 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6.

Tip: Pierce the skin before cooking and drain off the excess fat halfway through cooking.

Chicken should be cooked in a preheated oven at 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4 for 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes.

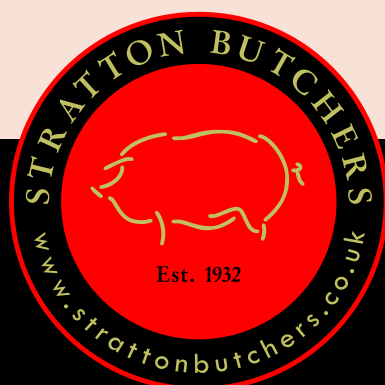
Tip: Cover your chicken with foil during cooking and uncover for the last 30 minutes to brown the skin. To stop the meat drying out, baste it every 30 minutes during cooking.

Leftovers

It's very important to keep cooked meat and poultry in the fridge. If they are left out at room temperature, food poisoning bacteria can grow and multiply. So, after you have carved your turkey (or other bird), cool any leftovers as quickly as possible (within one to two hours), cover them and put them in the fridge.

When you're serving cold turkey, try to take out only as much as you're going to use and leave the rest in the fridge. Don't leave a plate of turkey or cold meats out all day, on a buffet for example. Put it back in the fridge as soon as you can, ideally within an hour.

If you're reheating leftover turkey, or other food, always make sure it's piping hot all the way through before you eat it. And don't reheat more than once. Ideally, try to use leftovers within 48 hours.



How To Place Your Christmas Order

Visit our website www.strattonbutchers.co.uk and download our Christmas Order Form or collect one from our shop in the high street. Complete the order form and bring it into the shop with your deposit. Then collect your order just before Christmas.