

# The Holiday Turkey Perfected



After roasting 30 birds, we discover an unusual technique for producing exceptionally moist breast meat and fully cooked legs.



BY PAM ANDERSON WITH KAREN TACK



Although turkey has become commonplace, most cooks roast whole birds only at holiday time. We all know why this is, too: the bird may look lovely on the platter, but more often than not it's bland and dry, salvaged only by good gravy and wonderful side dishes.

Is it possible to roast a turkey perfectly? Usually juicy breast meat comes with a price — shocking pink legs and thighs. You have some leeway with the dark meat, which is almost impossible to dry out during normal roasting times. The trick is that the breast, which is exposed to direct heat and finishes cooking at a lower temperature, becomes parched while the legs and thighs take their time creeping to doneness. Nearly every roasting method in existence tries to compensate for this; few succeed.

There are literally hundreds of different methods of roasting turkey; we tested a dozen or so fairly different ones, from traditional to idiosyncratic. Our goals were to end up with an attractive bird, to determine the ideal internal temperature, and find a method that would finish both legs and thighs simultaneously.

There were other issues as well: We like stuffing, but wondered whether, by necessitating longer cooking times, it leads to drier meat. Is basting a ritual done more for the sake of the cook, or is it time well spent? Is stuffing the cavity with herbs and vegetables a waste of good thyme, not to mention celery, carrots, and onions? Perhaps roasting these same vegetables alongside the turkey makes for more flavorful pan juices and therefore better gravy? These were our original questions for research. Once

we started roasting, we realized there were others we didn't even know to ask.

## How Not to Roast a Turkey

Our first roasting experiments used the method most frequently promoted by the National Turkey Federation, the United States Department of Agriculture, and legions of cookbook authors and recipe writers. This, of course, features a moderate (325-degree) oven, a breast-up bird, and an open pan. We tried this method twice, basting one turkey and leaving the other alone. The basted turkey acquired a beautifully tanned skin, while the unbasted bird remained quite pale. Both were cooked to 170 degrees in the leg/thigh. Despite the fact that this was 10 degrees lower than recommend by the USDA and most producers, the breasts still registered a throat-catchingly dry 180 degrees.

We quickly determined that almost all turkeys roasted in the traditional, breast-up manner produced breast meat that was consistently 10 degrees ahead of the leg/thigh meat (tenting the breast with heavy-duty foil was the exception; read on). Because white meat is ideal at 160 degrees, and dark thigh meat just loses its last shades of pink at about 162, you might conclude, as we did, that roasting turkeys with their breasts up is a losing proposition.

Still, we pressed on, next trying a 2-hour turkey — essentially braising the bird at 425 degrees in air-tight heavy-duty foil for the first hour, then removing the foil and roasting at a slightly lower temperature for the second. Like all of the other breast-up methods, this produced

white meat that was 10 degrees hotter than dark meat, but at least this turkey seemed a bit juicier than those cooked with purely dry heat. However, the turkey's spotty brown skin, which looked sticky, thin, and translucent, was a definite drawback. And because the pan juices sweated along with the bird for the first hour of cooking, the liquid added to the pan finished thin and brothy — great for turkey soup, but not intense enough to make a good pan gravy. A related technique, turkey roasted in a chemical-free brown bag atop carrots, celery, and onions, received a high score for its beautiful brown skin. Its taste and texture, however, were only average; the bird was typically dry and bland.

One recipe instructed us to make a paste of flour and butter, then rub it onto the turkey skin before roasting. The ensuing crust would theoretically seal in the juices and roast the turkey to perfection. The results were disappointing; the turkey's skin was swelled and soggy and the breast meat was dry and chalky, leaving only a flavorless pasty feeling in the mouth.

A number of recipes call for placing butter-soaked cheesecloth over the breast for most of the roasting time, augmented by occasional basting. The cheesecloth is removed during the last minutes of cooking to allow the skin to brown. This technique produces magazine-cover turkey, but does nothing to lower the temperature of the breast meat or to improve the flavor. It joined most of the others in the reject pile.

Injecting butter into the turkey was another logical-sounding attempt to keep it juicy and make it flavorful. But while the skin ballooned during roasting, it deflated once out of the oven, and much of the injected butter wound up in the bird's cavity; the rest of it formed pockets at injection sites rather than infusing the whole bird as we had hoped. Even though the meat surrounding the pockets was nicely seasoned, the overall results were inconsistent, and the technique felt contrived.

We also discovered that stuffing a bird virtually guarantees overcooked meat. Because it slows interior cooking (our tests showed a nearly 30-degree difference in internal temperature after an hour in the oven), stuffing means longer oven times, which translates to bone-dry surface meat. Unless stuffing is your passion, cook your dressing separately.

## On the Right Track

Of all the breast-up methods, tenting the bird's breast and upper legs with foil, as suggested by

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ME TO SHARE THIS WITH YOU.

SINCERELY  
DR. Alex

numerous authors, including Rick Rodgers, worked the best. The foil deflects some of the oven's heat, reducing the ultimate temperature differential between white and dark meat from 10 to 6 degrees. The bird is roasted at a consistent 325-degree temperature, and during the last 45 minutes of roasting the foil is removed, allowing enough time for lovely browning. If you're partial to open-pan roasting and don't care to follow the technique we developed, try the foil shield; it certainly ran a close second.

Many people resort to butchery in an attempt to compensate for the fact that white meat roasts more quickly than dark. A friend roasts his turkey whole, removes the breast, and returns the legs to the oven while he carves white meat at the table. Guests enjoy white meat the first time around and dark meat for seconds. This is fine for those who like both parts of the bird, but an informal poll revealed that dark-meat-only lovers do not receive this method well.

Then there were the really unusual methods, such as Julia Child's clever technique of roasting breast and legs/thighs separately. You might think dismantling a turkey is difficult, but cutting out the backbone and separating the whole legs from the breast takes less than 10 minutes. We liked how quickly the turkey parts roasted: the legs cooked more quickly than the breast, and were done in 45 minutes, and the breast followed with a temperature of 160 to 165 about 10 minutes later. In an attempt to make the bird appear whole, we secured the legs to the breast with skewers, put it on a serving platter, and garnished it with garlands of herbs. Although not quite what we wanted, this method does have two advantages: it is quick, and you can easily roast each portion perfectly.

A related but somewhat less drastic technique is to remove the backbone of the bird before cooking, on the theory that the portions of meat nearest the cavity take the longest to cook. Although this technique reduced the temperature variation between breast and leg and produced juicy meat, the bird looked fat, stubby, and unnatural at the table. After dissecting a number of birds in various ways, we decided that, although these techniques are perfectly acceptable at other times during the year, the holiday turkey should be spared the knife until it reaches the table.

### The Successes

Amidst all these failures and near-successes, some real winners did emerge. Early on, we became fans of Maria Da Mota's method, described in Jean Anderson's *Foods of Portugal* (William Morrow, 1986); most other turkeys were bland and boring compared to this one. The secret: the turkey soaks in water seasoned with two pounds of salt for up to 24 hours. When we first removed the brined turkey from the refrigerator, we found a beautiful, milky-white bird. Following recipe instructions, we roasted it breast-side up in a 400-degree oven. Except for some parched marks along the breast

## THE SCIENCE OF BRINING

Our tasters found that brining the turkey for four hours gives roasted birds firm, meaty texture and well-seasoned flavor. They also reported that brined turkeys are moister and juicier. To explain these sensory perceptions, we attempted to gather some empirical data. We started by weighing several 11-pound birds after they had been brined for four hours, and found an average weight gain of almost three-quarters of a pound. Even more impressive, we found that brined birds weighed six to eight ounces more after roasting than a same-sized bird that had not been brined. Our taste buds were right: brined birds are juicier.

Jane Bowers, head of the Department of Foods and Nutrition at Kansas State University, says salt is used in meat processing to extract proteins from muscle cells and make these proteins more viscous: "Brining turkey causes a change in the structure of the proteins in the muscle. They become sticky, which allows them to hold more water." Citing a similar example, she says frankfurters without sodium are limp. "It is the salt that gives hot dogs their plumpness," she says.

Tina Seelig, scientist and author of *The Epicurean Laboratory* (W. H. Freeman, 1991), says salt causes protein strands to become de-



*Brining (soaking in salt water) is a time-honored culinary technique. In our tests, it resulted in a juicier, more well-seasoned turkey. Roast the bird as soon as possible after brining, or some of the brining solution will leech out of the meat.*

natured, or unwound. This is the same process that occurs when proteins are exposed to heat, acid, or alcohol. "When protein strands unwind, they get tangled in one another and trap water in the matrix that forms," says Seelig.

And Dr. Bill Schwartz, director of technical services at the Butterball Turkey Company, adds that when these unravelled proteins are exposed to heat they gel —

much like a fried egg white — and form a barrier that prevents water from leaking out of the bird as it cooks. The capillary action that draws blood out of the meat and gives it a milky-white color also helps the brining solution penetrate deep into the meat, according to Schwartz. This accounts for the pleasant salty flavor even of the inner breast meat.

—Jack Bishop

bone and leg tops, this nicely browned turkey showed well.

More important, the texture of the breast was different from that of the other birds we had cooked; they were firm and juicy at the same time. And the turkey tasted fully seasoned; others had required a bite of skin with the meat to achieve the same effect. The drawbacks: this bird might be a bit too salty for some, although we thought it perfect, and its pan drippings were inedibly salty by any standards. We experimented with the brining time, and found that 4 to 6 hours in a cool spot (a winter basement would be fine in cool climates, a refrigerator else-

where) produces pleasantly seasoned turkeys and not overly salty pan juices.

Brining was our first real breakthrough; we now believe it to be essential in achieving perfect taste and texture. But we had yet to discover the way to roast.

Our most successful attempt at achieving equal temperatures in leg and breast came when we followed James Beard's technique of turning the turkey as it roasts. In this method, the bird begins breast side down on a V-rack, then spends equal time on each of its sides before being turned breast side up. The V-rack is important not just to hold the turkey in place, but

## GRILLING THE HOLIDAY BIRD

In *The Grilling Encyclopedia* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992), Corte Sinnes published a fascinating recipe for Pandora's Turkey, so-called because under no circumstances can you peek during roasting. Following his instructions, but using a smaller turkey, we arranged five pounds of hot coals on opposite sides of a grill, set the turkey in a roasting pan on the grill rack, and closed the lid. Using the grill's built-in thermometer, we tracked the temperature, which never fell below 450 degrees during the first hour and a half. Seeing this, we decided to risk the curse and check our bird. This was one of the few times during our testing that we actually saw a pop-up timer standing tall; this bird was way overcooked.

Still, the technique had much to commend it. Using the grill frees the oven for all the side dishes. The skin color was a smashing mahogany, and the smoke lent the meat a subtle flavor. We decided to refine the technique.

Because frequent turning was not a good option, we began by tenting the breast with foil, but the grill heat was so intense that this was ineffective. So we tried one turn during roasting, and produced turkeys with bronzed backs, lily-white breasts, and a long cooking time. Sinnes was right: removing the lid kills the heat, making it impossible to both turn the bird and brown it nicely. Finally, we tried adding a burst of hot coals at the midpoint turn. The result: Juicy breast. Well-seasoned meat. Good color. Mission accomplished.

elevate the turkey, affording some protection from the heat of the roasting pan. This combination of rack and technique produced turkey with roast temperature as low as, and sometimes lower than, that of the legs.

### Perfecting Oven Technique

Because we were using smaller turkeys than the bird had used, we had to fine-tune his method. Large turkeys spend enough time in the oven to brown at 350 degrees; our turkeys were in the 12-pound range and were cooking in as little as 1½ hours, yielding quite pale skin. Clearly, we needed higher heat.

Reviewing our notes, we noticed that the roasted birds were usually the evenly browned, beautiful ones. So we turned up the heat to 400 degrees, basted faithfully, and got what we wanted. In an effort to streamline, we tried to skip the leg-up turns, roasting only breast side down, then breast side up. But in order for the turkey to brown all over, these two extra turns are necessary. Brining, turning, and basting

are work, yes, but the combination produces the best turkey we've ever had.

### The Subtleties

During our first few tests, we discovered that filling the cavity with aromatic herbs and vegetables made for a subtle but perceptible difference in flavor. This was especially noticeable in the inner meat of the leg and thigh; turkeys with hollow cavities, by contrast, tasted bland.

Roasted alongside the turkey, the same combination of carrot, celery, onion, and thyme also did wonders for the pan juices. But these vegetables dry up fairly quickly, burning rather than caramelizing over the 2-hour-plus roasting period. Roasting the turkey on a broiler pan with a perforated cover kept the juices from evaporating too quickly; we also added just enough stock to keep the vegetables moist until the turkey juices started to flow.

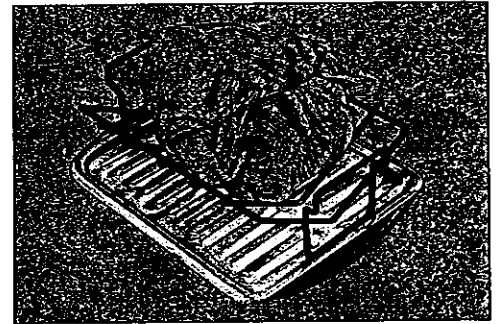
### THE BEST OVEN-ROASTED TURKEY WITH GIBLET PAN SAUCE

Serves 10-12

The ideal roasting equipment for the turkey is a shallow broiler pan with a perforated cover. It's important that the pan be shallow (about one-inch high); if the covered pan is too deep, the turkey may not fit in your oven when the bird roasts on its side. The perforated cover allows the turkey drippings to flow down to the vegetables, while keeping the pan juices from evaporating too quickly.

- 1 turkey (12 to 14 pounds gross weight), rinsed thoroughly, giblets and tail removed
- 2 pounds salt
- 3 medium onions, chopped coarse
- 1½ medium carrots, chopped coarse
- 1½ celery stalks, chopped coarse
- 6 thyme sprigs
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted, plus extra for basting
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

1. Place turkey in a pot large enough to hold it easily. Pour salt into neck and body cavities; pour salt all over turkey and rub into skin. Add cold water to cover, rubbing bird and stirring water until salt dissolves. Set turkey in a refrig-



Because it elevates the bird, a V-rack promotes even roasting and prevents overcooked breast meat.

erator or other cool location for 4 to 6 hours. Remove turkey from salt water and rinse both cavities and skin under cool running water for several minutes until all traces of salt are gone.

2. Meanwhile, reserve liver and put giblets, neck and tail piece, ½ of the onions, celery, carrots, thyme sprigs, and the bay leaf in a large saucepan. Add 6 cups water and bring to a boil, skimming foam from surface as necessary. Simmer, uncovered, adding liver during last 5 minutes of cooking, for a total of about 1 hour. Strain broth (you should have about 4½ cups); set neck, tail, and giblets aside. Cool to room temperature, and refrigerate until ready to use. Remove meat from neck and tail, cut giblets into a medium dice, and refrigerate meat and giblets until ready to use.

3. Heat oven to 400 degrees. Toss another ½ of onions, carrots, celery, and thyme with 1 tablespoon butter and place in body cavity. Bring turkey legs together and perform simple truss (see illustrations, page 18).

4. Scatter remaining vegetables and thyme over a shallow roasting pan; pour 1 cup reserved broth over vegetables. Put perforated cover on roasting pan; set a V-rack (preferably nonstick) adjusted to widest setting on top of the cover. Brush entire breast side of turkey with butter, then place turkey, breast side down, on V-rack. Brush entire back side of turkey with butter.

5. Roast for 45 minutes. Remove pan from oven (close oven door); baste turkey with butter. With a wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn turkey, leg/thigh side up. If broth has totally evaporated, add an additional ½ cup stock to pan. Return turkey to oven and roast 15 min-

### HOW MUCH DOES A 12-POUND TURKEY WEIGH?

The real weight of turkeys readied for cooking is quite different from the package weight. After removing the packaging and giblets (which sometimes included the tail piece), and allowing the birds to drain, we found variations of up to 1½ pounds

from sticker weights. One 11¼-pound turkey, for example, wound up with a true net weight of 10¼ pounds. This affects both serving size and scheduling: If you calculate cooking times for a 12-pound turkey that is actually closer to 10, and use the inaccurate

but common rule of 20 to 25 minutes per pound, your turkey could be done 40 to 50 minutes early. If you've already figured in a 30-minute rest, you'll be serving cold turkey. Not only that, there will be considerably less of it than you originally thought.

utes. Remove turkey from oven again, baste, and again use paper toweling to turn the other leg/thigh side up; roast for another 15 minutes. Remove turkey from oven for final time, baste, and turn it breast side up; roast until meat thermometer stuck in leg pit registers 165 degrees, about 30 to 45 minutes. Breast should register 160 to 165 as well. Transfer turkey to platter; let rest for 20 to 30 minutes.

6. Meanwhile, strain pan drippings into a large saucepan (discard solids) and skim fat. Return broiler pan to stove and place over 2 burners set to medium heat. Add 3 cups reserved broth to the broiler pan and, using a wooden spoon, stir to loosen brown bits. When pan juices start to simmer, strain into saucepan along with giblets; bring to a boil. Mix cornstarch with ½ cup water and gradually stir into saucepan. Bring to boil; simmer until sauce thickens slightly. Carve turkey; serve with gravy.

### THE BEST GRILL-ROASTED TURKEY

Serves 10–12

This is an adaptation of a recipe from Corte Sinnes, author of *The Grilling Encyclopedia* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992). My chimney starter holds about four of the five pounds of charcoal needed to roast this turkey. I place the other pound of charcoal in two piles on opposite sides of the grill and simply pour the hot coals over them; within minutes all the coals are red hot. Make sure your grill lid is tall enough to accommodate a turkey.

1. Follow steps 1, 2, and 3 (except heating oven) in recipe above.

2. Heat 5 pounds of charcoal (*see note, above*). If using a chimney starter, pour half the coals into 2 piles on opposite sides of grill; otherwise use long-handled tongs to separate coals into 2 piles, on opposite sides of grill; put grill rack in position.

3. Scatter remaining vegetables and thyme over a 15-by-10-inch roasting pan; pour 1 cup reserved broth over vegetables. Set a V-rack adjusted to its widest setting in pan. Cover pan, excluding rack area, with foil to keep pan juices from evaporating. Brush breast with butter, then position turkey, breast side down, on V-rack, and brush back with butter as in step 4 above.

4. Grill-roast turkey, positioning pan between 2 piles of coals, for 1 hour. About 40 minutes into roasting, heat an additional 1½ pounds of charcoal. Remove turkey from grill, remove grill rack, stir up coals, and add half new hot coals to each pile; replace lid. Baste back side of turkey with butter, then with a wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn turkey breast side up and baste. Check pan drippings and add an additional ½ cup broth if vegetables are starting to burn. Return pan to the grill; quickly replace lid, roast until meat thermometer stuck in leg pit registers 165 degrees, about 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes longer. Transfer turkey to a platter; let rest for 20 to 30 minutes.

5. Follow step 6 above for pan sauce. ■

### HOW DO POP-UP TIMERS WORK?

More than a decade ago, some poultry suppliers began inserting automatic pop-up timers in their birds. The technology behind this device is quite simple. A compound with a known melting temperature is liquefied in the bottom of the timer device. A spring is compressed into the molten material as it cools and hardens. The timer is then inserted in the thickest part of the breast. When the material at the bottom of the timer melts again during cooking, the spring is free to expand and the plastic stem rises.

While frequent basting can sometimes clog the spring mechanism or cause it to pop up too quickly (the very hot liquid may

melt the base material too early), there is a more basic problem with pop-up timers. Volk Enterprises in California, the only American producer of the devices, calibrates theirs to "pop" at 178 degrees, a temperature chosen to guarantee that the legs will be well done — but that also ensures that the breast meat will be way overcooked. (The company's timers for turkey breasts sold separately are calibrated at 163 degrees, a temperature that is much more friendly to delicate white meat.) Our advice: ignore the timer that comes with your holiday turkey and rely on your own thermometer.

—Jack Bishop

### INTERNAL TEMPERATURE — HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Industry standards developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the National Turkey Federation call for whole birds to be cooked to an internal thigh temperature of 180 to 185 degrees. The breast temperature, according to these standards, should be 170 degrees. Our kitchen tests showed, however, that breast temperature rarely drops below that of the thigh, no matter how you cook the bird. And no meat is at its best at a temperature of 180 or 185 degrees.

While the USDA might have us believe that the only safe turkey is a dry turkey, this just isn't true. The two main bacterial problems in turkey are salmonella and campylobacter. According to USDA standards, salmonella in meat is killed at 160 degrees. Turkey is no different. So why the higher safety standard of 180 degrees?

Susan Connolly, director of the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, believes that "Most people think that turkey, especially dark meat, tastes better when cooked to 180 degrees." Perhaps more convincing is her claim that stuffing must reach an internal temperature of 165 degrees to be considered safe. (Carbohydrates such as

bread provide a better medium for bacterial growth than do proteins such as meat; hence the extra safety margin of 5 degrees). In order to raise stuffing temperature to safe levels, thigh meat must usually top 180 degrees.

Since we recommend roasting a turkey without bread-based stuffing, a finished temperature of 160 to 165 degrees is more than adequate to kill possible pathogens, even according to USDA standards. A number of food scientists all confirmed the safety of this recommendation.

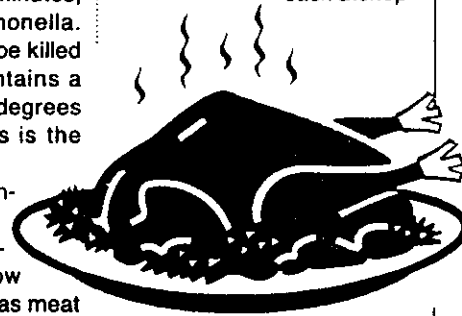
E. M. Foster, a professor of food microbiology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, says that killing salmonella depends on a complex relation between temperature and time. To rid foods of bacteria, the industry uses two common methods, "fast" and "slow." In the slow method, food is held at 143 degrees for 30 minutes, eliminating the salmonella. Salmonella will also be killed when the food maintains a temperature of 160 degrees for 15 seconds; this is the "fast" method.

Because home conditions are imprecise, Foster doesn't recommend the slow method. But as long as meat

temperature is properly measured in the deepest part of the thigh and away from the bone, he is confident that a reading of 160 degrees will certainly last for 15 seconds and indicate that any possible salmonella bacteria has been killed. And campylobacter, the other important bacterial contaminant, is even more sensitive to heat than salmonella.

The final word on poultry safety is this: As long as your thermometer reaches 160 degrees, all unstuffed meat (including turkey) should be bacteria-free. Since home thermometers may vary by a couple of degrees, you may want to wait until the thermometer registers 165 degrees, just to be safe (we found that dark meat also tastes better at this temperature). But bacteria in meat cooked to 180 or 185 degrees is long gone — as is moistness and flavor.

—Jack Bishop



# Roast Turkey Revisited



We find that, with decreased brining strength and a lower oven temperature, the method we developed for small turkeys works just as well for larger birds.

BY PAM ANDERSON WITH KAREN TACK

I haven't touched another turkey since that hot summer of 1993 when we roasted more than thirty of them for the November/December issue (see "The Holiday Turkey Perfected"). During those many tests, we discovered two essential keys: Turkey tasted better if it was first brined in salt water, and the breast didn't overcook (always an issue when cooked conventionally) if the turkey was rotated during roasting.

Back in '93, we roasted only smaller, twelve- to fourteen-pound turkeys. Obviously, when you cooked as many as we did, the smaller the better. When number thirty-something emerged from the oven looking good and tasting even better, we quit. We had taken the experiment as far as we could. We knew, however, that many Thanksgiving birds are necessarily larger—and we got many calls from readers wondering how to adapt our method for bigger birds. So we decided to revisit the subject this year, but this time using turkeys in the eighteen- to twenty-pound bracket.

## Less Salt, Tastes Great

In our original experiments, we settled on a four-hour brining time, but it meant that cooks had to get up with the chickens to brine and roast their Thanksgiving turkey. Given the increased roasting time of a larger bird, this method would have had cooks arising in the middle of the night.

If we decreased the brine strength, we wondered, might we achieve a convenient overnight brine? Our original brine called for two pounds of salt with a four-hour brining time. This time around, we reduced the salt to one pound and increased the brining time to eight hours. The time schedule proved more convenient, and the resulting roasted turkeys and gravies tasted pleasantly seasoned. (Just be sure not to resalt the turkey before roasting, and don't salt the giblet broth.)

Next we adjusted the roasting technique. Turning a twenty-pound bird on its side the way we could with the ten- and twelve-pounders was just asking for trouble. Even if it were possible, most ovens aren't big enough for a really large turkey to sit wing side up. Our smaller birds did not brown evenly without the extra turns, but the larger turkeys, given their longer roasting times, browned evenly with just one flip—from breast side down to breast side up.

Echoing our '93 experience, roasting temperature became our real challenge. Because of the turkeys' large size, we found that roasting at 350 and 400 degrees tended to overcook the exterior by the time the interior was done. We eventually found that roasting these large turkeys at 250 de-

grees breast side down, then breast side up produced the most evenly cooked turkeys. To brown the skin, we increased the oven temperature to 400 degrees for the final hour of roasting.

Originally we recommended roasting the turkey on a V-rack set over a perforated broiler pan. Because we were cooking the smaller birds at a high temperature, we found the pan juices evaporated quickly, causing the vegetables to burn. We recommended a perforated broiler pan that would allow the turkey juices to drip down while keeping the liquid from evaporating as quickly. This helped, but more liquid still needed to be added and the perforated lid prohibited the cook from checking the amount of liquid in the pan. We now prefer a simpler solution: Roast the turkey on a V-rack set in a heavy-duty roasting pan. When more water is needed (which is now easy to see), just add it.

We've also decided that you don't need to add stock to the pan during roasting. Water, cooked with the pan vegetables and turkey drippings, makes a flavorful enough liquid to mix with the giblet broth.

## ROAST TURKEY WITH GIBLET PAN SAUCE

Serves 18 to 20

- 1 turkey (18 to 20 pounds gross weight), rinsed thoroughly, giblets, neck, and tail piece removed and set aside
- 1 pound salt (about 1 cup table salt or 2 cups kosher)
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 medium onions, chopped coarse
- 1½ medium carrots, chopped coarse
- 1½ celery stalks, chopped coarse
- 6 thyme sprigs
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted, plus extra for brushing and basting turkey
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

1. Place turkey in large stockpot or clean bucket. Add 2 gallons water and salt. Refrigerate or set in very cool (40 degrees or less) spot for 8 hours.

2. Remove turkey from salt water and rinse both cavities and skin under cool running water for several minutes until all traces of salt are gone.

3. Meanwhile, reserving liver, put

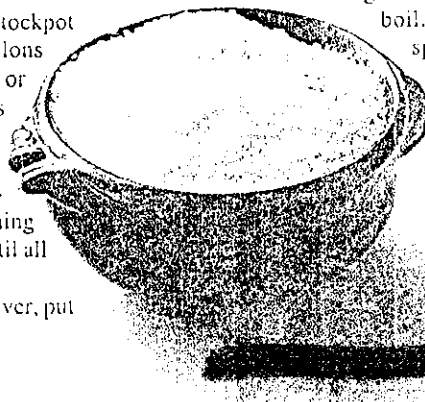
giblets, neck, and tail piece, bay leaf, and one-third each of onions, carrots, celery, and thyme in large saucepan. Add 6 cups water and bring to simmer, skimming foam from surface as necessary. Bring to boil, then simmer, uncovered, to make a flavorful broth, about 1 hour (add reserved liver during last 5 minutes of cooking). Strain broth (setting giblets, neck, and tail aside), cool to room temperature, and refrigerate until ready to use. (You should have about 1 quart of broth.) Remove meat from neck and tail, cut giblets into medium dice, and refrigerate until ready to use.

4. Heat oven to 250 degrees. Toss another third of the onions, carrots, celery, and thyme with 1 tablespoon butter and place in body cavity. Bring legs together and perform simple truss (see "The Holiday Turkey Perfected," November/December 1993).

5. Scatter remaining vegetables and thyme in roasting pan; pour 1 cup water over vegetables. Set heavy-duty V-rack, adjusted to widest setting, in pan. Brush entire breast side of turkey with butter, then place turkey, breast side down, on V-rack. Brush entire back side of turkey with butter.

6. Roast 3 hours, basting back side every hour or so and adding small quantities of water if vegetables look dry. Remove pan from oven (close oven door); baste with butter. With wad of paper toweling in each hand, turn breast side up. Continue to roast 1 hour, basting once or twice. With turkey still in oven, increase oven temperature to 400 degrees; roast until skin has browned and internal temperature of legs and breast registers about 165 degrees, about 1 hour longer. Transfer turkey to platter; let rest 20 to 30 minutes.

7. Meanwhile, strain pan drippings into large saucepan (discard solids) and skim fat. Return roasting pan to stove and place over two burners set on medium heat. Add reserved broth to roasting pan, and using wooden spoon, stir to loosen brown bits. When juices start to simmer, strain into saucepan containing pan drippings along with reserved giblets; bring to boil. Mix cornstarch with 3 tablespoons water and gradually stir into pan juices. Bring to boil; simmer until sauce thickens slightly. Carve turkey; serve sauce passed separately. ■



Salt brining makes for a better tasting turkey.