

# How to mix Thanksgiving up without sacrificing tradition

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When it comes to mashed potatoes for Thanksgiving, keep it classic. / AP

Written by Michele Kayal Associated Press

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After settling on the base for your stuffing, go for the flair like this multigrain and wild rice stuffing with apples and herbs. Recipe

Some cooks like to change up the Thanksgiving meal — a sous vide turkey here, a sweet potato souffle there. But on a holiday dedicated to tradition, innovation can spark revolt.

“Know your audience,” says Jack Bishop, editorial director of America’s Test Kitchen. “The people I know want a pie for dessert and they’re not really interested in going too far afield. And the turkey is the turkey, and there’s not really a lot you can do there.”

But if you’re the cook, making the same meal year after year can be mind-numbing. Here’s a brief guide to knowing just how classic you have to keep the classics, and how far you can push things.

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### Thanksgiving hosting tips

- **Don't leave all meal preparation for Thanksgiving Day.**

A traditional Thanksgiving Day dinner includes dishes that require lengthy prep and cooking times. Create a meal-preparation schedule that begins days before the holiday. Don't underestimate thawing time for a frozen turkey. Depending on its size, a frozen turkey may require two days to defrost for cooking. Consider preparing side dishes the day before, or at minimum, preparing ingredients (i.e. chopping vegetables) in advance.

- **Running an oven's self-clean cycle the day before.**

Due to extremely high temperatures of the self-cleaning function, there is risk of damage to an electrical component or the door latch, according to Chris Hall, president and co-founder of RepairClinic.com.

Self-cleaning ovens should not be cleaned with a general oven-cleaning spray, as the formula may damage the self-cleaning surfaces of the oven's interior.

- **A disorganized kitchen that complicates meal prep and leftover storage.**

Set aside one to two hours to clean out your refrigerator, freezer and cabinetry and toss out expired items. Reorganize to maximize space. Take an inventory of your pots, pans and other cookware to ensure that you have enough for everything you plan to cook.

- **One-person cooking.** Ask guests to bring side dishes and desserts. Most people are happy to contribute.

- **Chaotic clean-up.** Don't do all of the clean-up work yourself and then act annoyed that no one helped you. Delegate point people to load the dishwasher, wrap leftovers, take out the trash, etcetera. If everyone knows what they're supposed to do, you'll enjoy a far more efficient clean-up process.

— McClatchy-Tribune Information Services

### Hotline help

- **Butterball:** (800) 288-8372, helping solve turkey dilemmas, including Thanksgiving Day.

- **Ocean Spray:** (800) 662-3263, experts can handle your questions regarding all things cranberries. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. today and Monday-Wednesday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Thanksgiving Day.

- **Crisco Pie Hotline:** (877) 367-7438, live pie experts on-call 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. today and Monday through Wednesday. Additionally, recorded tips and tricks can be accessed 24 hours a day.

the method.

The classic Thanksgiving turkey gets rubbed with butter and salt, and maybe a few herbs.

"A lot of people expect the same meal all the time," says Mary Risley, director of San Francisco's Tante Marie's Cooking School. "It's the one meal that every ethnic group across this country eats. And maybe the Italians have ravioli before, and maybe the Chinese have dumplings before, but everybody has turkey. So don't mess with the turkey."

But Rick Rodgers, author of more than 40 cookbooks, including "Thanksgiving 101," says you can keep it real but still have a little fun. "Doing something as simple as cooking the turkey outdoors on your grill is a way to take something traditional into the 21st century," he says.

Bishop says once you've broken that mold and put the bird on the grill, you might as well play with a few flavors. "Doing a spice rub with cumin and chili powder and cinnamon, you can have some fun there," he says. "As long as you choose a spice rub that's not too unusual and you don't do it two years in a row you'll be fine."

And in the home of Erling Wu-Bower, chef de cuisine at Chicago's Nico Osteria, Cajun-rubbed turkey is traditional. "We make this spicy Cajun lemony rub and poke holes and put whole cloves of garlic in it."

Wu-Bower cooks the bird in the oven wrapped in foil so it essentially steams, then browns it at high temperature. "You can't touch the turkey," he says. "This is the traditional bird."

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