

Make Dinner Easy Presents:

# Easy Thanksgiving Dinner Ideas

Includes  
Step by Step Planning Guide  
Make Ahead Recipes  
and a Grocery Shopping list

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## Easy Thanksgiving Dinner Ideas

I'm not sure if there is a more pressure packed meal than Thanksgiving Dinner. Trying your best to make a picture perfect meal, a moist turkey, and keep the kids entertained can be a challenge for even the experienced cook.

I hope to help reduce your stress by providing a sample menu, a grocery shopping list, recipes with detailed instructions, and a timeline so you don't have to do all the cooking on Thanksgiving Day. As a bonus, I'm throwing in some ideas of fun Thanksgiving traditions you can start and activities to keep kids busy that will help you out at the same time.

You certainly can read this book from start to finish or just flip to any of the following sections that suit your needs:

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## Thanksgiving Traditions

If you are looking to begin some new family traditions, Thanksgiving is a great time to start. Although many families serve a traditional thanksgiving dinner menu there are other activities that you can do before, during, and after the meal that may bring more meaning and more fun to your day.

### Thanksgiving Morning Turkey Bowl

I think the kids in my neighborhood look forward to the annual Thanksgiving morning turkey bowl even more than they look forward to eating turkey and all the trimmings. We have a large field across the street from our house which is the designated meet up place for our traditional Thanksgiving morning football game between kids and adults in our neighborhood as well as any friends or relatives that are visiting. What started out as a few games of football has morphed into a huge breakfast buffet with sausages on the grill, a pot luck of bagels, coffee cakes, juice, coffee, and even a pitcher of Bloody Mary's for the adults. This is a really fun family tradition and gets the kids out of the house while the cook gets the turkey into the oven.

### Picnic Breakfast – Watching the Parades on Television

If the weather or your neighborhood isn't conducive to a Turkey Bowl, Thanksgiving morning can be a fun time to break the rules and let the kids eat in front of the TV. You can spread out a large plastic or cloth tablecloth in front of the TV. To make it more interactive, you could give the kids index cards with numbers written on them so they can rate the floats as they watch the parades on TV.

### Break The Rules – Pie For Breakfast

I completely blame my mother for this tradition! She always baked pies the night before holiday dinners and managed to make one or two extra pies that we could eat for breakfast. I can justify just about anything, but this one is easy to justify. Pumpkin pie for example is loaded with pumpkin and eggs, very healthy foods. And apple pie probably doesn't have any more sugar in it than a donut or coffee cake. Anyway, my kids really get a kick out of breaking the rules, especially if it involves pie!

### Thanksgiving Day Menu – Make Your Own Rules

Granted most people eat Turkey with mashed potatoes and gravy for dinner but you don't have to. If you are cooking for one or two people you may just want to cook a turkey leg or small turkey breast. If you are vegetarian, side dishes may compromise your main meal. Many families like to add ethnic favorites to the traditional family meal such as lasagna or stuffed grape leaves. This is your dinner and your family. Make the menu meaningful to you. That in itself is a great tradition to start.

### Football on Television

The couch, especially the one right in front of the television, may be the most coveted seat in your house after dinner. Watching football on TV after (or before, or during!) is a family tradition in many households.

## Planning Makes Thanksgiving Dinner Easier

Whatever traditions you follow, the meal is usually at the center of the day. I recommend starting to plan out your meal and menu up to a month before Thanksgiving. At a minimum you usually need to do some planning a week or two ahead of time, especially if you plan to use a frozen turkey. Following a plan will allow you to break up the tasks over a number of days or weeks and will also give you options to ask others (even your kids!) to help. Here is a sample plan to give you an idea of things you may need to do as well as identifying those tasks which can be done in advance:

### **October/Start of November**

- Create and confirm the guest list
- Create a menu and decide if you will ask others to bring a dish, if so make a list of what others are bringing and what you will make or buy.
- Start gathering recipes. I like to keep a manila folder with the recipes, weekly to-do list, and guest list for each year. This can then be referred to next year if you are cooking again.

## **Beginning of November**

- Finalize the recipes that you will be using. If there is a recipe you've never made before you could try making it several weeks before Thanksgiving just to see if it turns out the way you want.
- If you will be cooking a fresh turkey, it can be ordered in advance. Frozen turkeys are often on sale early and can be bought and stored in the freezer.
- Make out grocery list. Divide it up into the non-perishable items that can be bought in advance, the items you may need early if you are making some dishes ahead of time, and perishable items that will be bought the day before.
- Plan seating arrangements and gather or borrow additional tables and chairs if needed
- Purchase or borrow cooking equipment or serving dishes you may need including: roasting pan with v-shaped rack, large stock pots, carving knife or electric knife, potato masher or hand-mixer, whisk, casserole dishes, turkey baster, pie plates, serving platters, meat thermometer, serving spoons, pie server, wine or beverage glasses, plates and silverware, table linens, table decor
- Go grocery shopping for non-perishable food items

## **The Week Before**

- Clean out your refrigerator (to make room for all the food!)
- Wash table linens
- Clean silverware if you are using special occasion silverware
- If you're using a frozen turkey, determine when the turkey needs to be moved from the freezer to the refrigerator to thaw (this can take 3-4 days or more!)
- Plan out your day to day to-do list for the final week, including any recipes that you can prepare in advance. The following is one of my plans from several years ago. The specific activities you have on your list will depend on the recipes that you are making.

## Sample Idea of Tasks for Thanksgiving Week

### Monday

- Go grocery shopping for make ahead recipe ingredients
- Make Cranberry Sauce

### Tuesday

- Make Basting Butter, clean house
- Make the No Lump Make Ahead Gravy and refrigerate

### Wednesday

- Prepare Make Ahead Mashed Potatoes and store in fridge
- Make desserts
- Prep ingredients for stuffing; cut up veggies
- Make dressing for Salad, prep/chop salad ingredients and store in separate containers
- Set the table
- Pick up the pre-ordered turkey from the butcher (if using a fresh turkey)
- Brine the turkey

**Thursday: (I often assign specific times of the day to each of these tasks. Starting with when I want to serve the meal and working backward from that time).**

- Make Basting Rub and Sauce for the Turkey
- Take turkey out of the fridge, rinse, and prep
- Put the turkey in the oven
- Assemble stuffing and place in a casserole dish

- Prep Roasted Sweet Potatoes, place on a cookie sheet on the counter until there is room in the oven to roast.
- Put make ahead mashed potatoes and stuffing in the oven
- Put butter and relish trays out on the table
- Take the turkey out of the oven, tent it with foil and let it rest before carving
- Roast Sweet Potatoes
- Cook Green Beans
- Heat up gravy, adding pan drippings and broth to thin it out if needed
- Put cold foods out on table
- Carve turkey
- Put hot foods on the table
- Count blessings and enjoy!

### Things to Consider Before Buying the Turkey

Before you even start planning your menu, there are some things to think about regarding the turkey.

#### **Type of Bird to Buy**

When planning to cook a turkey, you first need to decide whether to buy a fresh or frozen turkey. Your decision may be based on economics as frozen birds are usually less expensive, it may be based on health concerns as fresh birds often have less additives, or may be based on time and space constraints as frozen birds can take 3-4 days to properly thaw in the refrigerator. Personally, I place an order for a fresh turkey with my butcher 1-2 weeks before Thanksgiving and pick it up the day before. Occasionally throughout the year I will buy a non-basted frozen turkey. Turkey leftovers are great, no matter what time of year it is!

#### **How Much to Buy**

You can plan on anywhere from ½-1 pound per person. If you want a lot of leftovers, and have hearty eaters, then you may want to plan on a generous 1 ½ pounds per person. Personally, I love leftover turkey and often cube up the leftovers and freeze them to make [Leftover Turkey Recipes](#) at a later date.

#### **How to Defrost**

If you bought a frozen bird, plan that it will take about one day for every 4-5 pounds to defrost in the refrigerator. So, a 15 pound hen will take 3-4 days to defrost. When defrosting, keep the turkey in the original packaging, and I recommend placing it inside of a clean plastic garbage bag and then placing it in a large pan inside of the refrigerator in case there are any leaks.

If you have a frozen turkey and need to defrost it quickly, you can use a cold water defrosting method in which you place the bird, in its original packaging, in a cold water bath and change out the water every 30 minutes. This will take about 30 minutes a pound to defrost. So, that 15 pound bird might take about 8 hours until it's fully defrosted. If you use this method, your bird needs to be cooked immediately after defrosting. This is a more difficult method to manage and one I don't recommend. If possible, try to plan so you can use the refrigerator defrosting method outlined above.

### **Have The Right Equipment**

There are a few things that you will need that you might not normally use; it's a good idea to make sure you have everything in advance. At a minimum I would recommend having a large roasting pan optimally with a V shaped rack, string or cooking twine, a baster, a meat thermometer, and a good carving knife. Many people like to use an electric knife, but a good slicing knife will also suffice. Some people prefer to use a disposable roasting pan. This can help with clean up but is less sturdy than a roasting pan and sometimes it is more difficult to scrape off the pan drippings from the turkey to add to the gravy. If you do use a disposable pan, I would recommend placing the pan on a sturdy rimmed cookie sheet to make transferring the bird in and out of the oven easier and safer.

In addition you might like to have disposable rubber gloves, a large plastic bag if you want to [brine the turkey](#), and large and extra large zip style bags to store leftovers and the turkey carcass (great to save for a [Turkey Soup Recipe](#) !) in the freezer.

### **Decide if you want to Brine, Rub, or Baste**

There are several ways to add moisture and flavor to a turkey.

The simplest method is to make a [Seasoned Butter Rub](#) which consists of butter and seasonings and rub this on the inside and outside of the bird before roasting

You can also make a [Basting Sauce](#) and baste the turkey along with some of the pan juices occasionally during the roasting process.

If you are buying an un-brined or un-basted turkey (that is an important distinction for this step!) and have room in your fridge, I prefer using an overnight brine bath in addition to the rub and the basting sauce. [Brining a Turkey](#) imparts flavor and moisture. Brining helps to tenderize the meat before cooking and if you thoroughly rinse the bird you will be pleasantly surprised that it does not taste salty! Regardless of which method you use, prepare the rub and the basting sauce before you prepare the bird.

### **Preparing the Bird**

The most important step is to remove the giblets inside the cavity of the turkey. These often come in a small disposable pouch. Many people like to save the giblets and simmer them in broth as a base for gravy. When handling the raw bird be very careful not to let the raw meat juices contaminate other surfaces. I prefer to use disposable rubber gloves and still wash my hand thoroughly afterward.

There is some debate on whether you should rinse the turkey first before roasting. If you do, then clear the sink of all other dishes, use a low stream of cold water and sanitize the sink and surrounding counters afterward with bleach or another sanitizing agent. Whether you rinse or you don't rinse, you can blot the inside and outside of the bird with paper towels. Another debate is whether to cook stuffing inside of the bird or cook it separately. I am a fan of cooking it separately to assure that the turkey and the stuffing are both properly cooked.

The bird then can be placed breast side up on an oiled rack in a roasting pan. You might notice that the legs wings are sticking out, which means they will cook faster than the rest of the bird. To prevent this, either tuck them in or tie them down with kitchen string.

## Turkey Brine Recipes

There are a number of turkey brine recipes; I prefer a simple one that is a combination of apple juice and kosher salt.

If you are unfamiliar with brining, it is one of a number of ways to prepare poultry before roasting. It is something I personally do when cooking Thanksgiving turkey.

A basic explanation is that brining is a form of reverse osmosis that opens up the protein fibers in the meat and expands and tenderizes them.

In order to brine a turkey you will need the ingredients for the brining liquid, a large brining bag (can be found at kitchen stores such as Williams & Sonoma or Bed Bath & Beyond), a large pan or tub to put the bagged turkey in (in case it springs a leak), and either space in your refrigerator or a large cooler with ice.

Basically a brine is a combination of sweetened water and salt that the turkey soaks in over night before roasting. Here are several recipes:

### Apple Juice Brine

(this is what I use)

For an 18-20# turkey combine 3 quarts of apple juice with 1.5 cups of kosher salt. Place the turkey in a brining bag. Combine the juice and the salt and pour over the turkey, seal the bag and refrigerate overnight.

### Flavored Brine

for an 18-20# turkey combine 2 cups kosher salt, 2 cups sugar, and 2 gallons of water in a large stock pot. Bring the liquid to a low simmer and add any of the following: 2 bay leaves, 1/2 cup of your favorite dried herbs and spices such as sage, oregano, or thyme), 1 tablespoon coarsely ground black pepper and several lemon and orange slices. Cool this liquid and pour the liquid over the turkey that has been placed in the brining bag. Seal the bag and refrigerate overnight.

One of the most important steps of brining is to rinse the bird very thoroughly before roasting. After the bird has been brined overnight, remove it from the refrigerator. Have a roasting pan with an oiled rack near the sink where you will rinse the turkey. Remove the bird from the brining bag and rinse well. Make sure you use a slow stream of cold water, to prevent splatters, and rinse the outside

and inside of both cavities very well. If you rinse the bird very well, it will not taste salty. While you are rinsing, splatters may occur. Make sure to sanitize your sink and counter areas, and wash your hands very well after you are finished.

This method has grown in popularity in recent years. While it may not be how your mother made her turkey, it is yet one of many options to choose from when deciding how you want to prepare a turkey.

When you put it all down on paper, you realize why cooking Thanksgiving Dinner can make even the experienced cook a bit nervous. The point I want to stress is that if you make a plan for yourself, Thanksgiving Dinner can actually be one of the easiest holiday dinners to make. One of the key activities is deciding on a menu, finding the recipes you want to make, and writing up a grocery shopping list. I'm going to help you make it a little easier by sharing a sample menu, recipes, and grocery list. You certainly can add or delete any recipe or ingredient and make it your own.

### Traditional Thanksgiving Dinner Menu

*Roast turkey with Rosemary Basting Sauce*  
*Make Ahead Mashed Potatoes served with*  
*No Lump/Make Ahead Gravy with Pan Drippings*  
*Unstuffed Stuffing*  
*Roasted Sweet Potatoes*  
*Bakery Rolls with Butter*  
*Citrus Spinach Salad*  
*Sautéed Green Beans*  
*Fresh Cranberry Sauce*  
*Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream*

## Thanksgiving Dinner Recipes

The menu can sound great, but you need great recipes with easy directions to pull it off. The following are recipes that I use to make my own Thanksgiving Dinner.

### **Recipe for Roasting a Turkey**



One 14-16 pound whole turkey (adjust the size as needed, usually plan on 1/2 to 1 pound per person )

#### **Seasoned Butter Rub**

1/2 stick (1/4 cup), unsalted butter, softened  
1/2 teaspoon black pepper  
1/4 teaspoon paprika

#### **Basting Sauce**

1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter  
1 small onion, finely diced  
1 clove minced garlic (optional)

2 Tablespoons freshly chopped rosemary  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper  
1/4 teaspoon salt (only if the turkey is not pre-basted or has not been [brined](#))

**Optional** (to put inside the large cavity while roasting):

1 small onion, peeled  
a lemon  
2 stalks of celery, cut in half  
1 sprig of fresh sage

Optional – brine the turkey the night before as outlined on page 8-9.

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Prepare the seasoned butter in one bowl and combine the basting sauce ingredients in a small saucepan.

Oil a roasting rack and set it inside the roasting pan, near the sink.

Gather several paper towels, a baster, pre-cut kitchen string, and disposable rubber gloves (if you prefer). Prepare the bird by removing the giblets, which may be in a small disposable bag inside the cavity of the bird. Rinse the inside and outside of the turkey with a low stream of cold water. Make sure that excess water is drained from both the neck cavity and the large inner cavity of the turkey. Place the drained turkey, breast side up, on the oiled rack in the roasting pan. Blot the inside and outside of the turkey with the paper towels.

Using your hands (this is why the rubber gloves are helpful!) massage the seasoned butter mixture into the inside and outside of the bird. If you would like, you can place a peeled onion, several stalks of celery, a sprig of fresh sage, and a lemon inside the cavity of the turkey. tie the legs together and the wings down with kitchen string.

Roast the turkey at 325°F for approximately 15 minutes per pound. While the turkey is roasting, simmer the basting sauce over low heat for 2-3 minutes, and then remove from the heat. While the turkey is roasting you can baste it occasionally with the melted basting butter, which can be reheated if necessary. If you've never used a baster before, go slowly so that the sauce doesn't spatter inside the oven!

Once the outside of the turkey is a nice golden brown color, then lightly tent it with foil to prevent it from getting over brown. Use a meat thermometer, placed in the deepest part of the thigh to assure that the bird is fully cooked; 165°F. Even if your turkey comes with a pop up timer, it's recommended to also use a meat thermometer. Once done, remove the turkey from the oven and let it sit on the counter, tented with foil, for about 20 minutes before carving.

### **Make Ahead Mashed Potatoes**

(Prep time: 40 minutes. Baking time: 30-45 minutes)

5 pounds russet, or baking, potatoes

½ cup (1 stick) salted butter

1 cup sour cream (reduced fat is okay to use)

8 ounces cream cheese, softened (reduced fat or fat free is okay to use)

1 teaspoon salt, or to taste

1. Peel and rinse potatoes. Cut potatoes into 2 inch pieces. Place potatoes in a large stock pot and cover with water. Bring water to a boil and continue to boil until potatoes are fork tender, approximately 18-20 minutes.
2. Drain potatoes and add remaining ingredients. Mash potatoes and mix well. To thoroughly mix ingredients you may want to use a hand or stand mixer. Taste and adjust amount of salt if necessary.
3. Transfer mashed potatoes to a shallow baking dish and cover with foil. Potatoes can be kept warm in the oven at this point, refrigerated or frozen.

Yield: 10-15 servings. I often make a full batch and divide the mashed potatoes between two serving dishes. Then I serve one now and serve the other in a few days.

Make ahead tip: These can be made several days ahead and kept in the refrigerator. 45 minutes before serving, place in an oven preheated to 350° and bake for 30-45 minutes or until hot.

## No-Lump Make-Ahead Gravy



2 Turkey legs, 2 Turkey Wings or a combo of the two (about 3 pounds total)  
1 onion, peeled and coarsely chopped  
2 Tablespoons olive oil  
6 cups of chicken broth  
1 large carrot cut in half

Roux (thickening mixture)

4 Tablespoons of butter plus 2 Tablespoons of light olive oil  
1 cup of flour  
2 cups of chicken broth (this is in addition to the chicken broth you used above)  
1/8 teaspoon salt, (or to taste, it really doesn't need much salt)  
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place turkey and onion in a 9x12x2 baking pan (do not use foil in the bottom of the pan). Toss with 2 Tablespoons of olive oil. Roast uncovered in the oven for 60 minutes.



After roasting, transfer the turkey and onions to a large stock pot, scraping the pan well and

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discarding any onions that are burned or overly browned. Add the chicken broth and carrot. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat to low. Continue to simmer with the lid off for 30 minutes. If the broth doesn't completely cover the turkey, that is fine. Just turn the meat over several times.

Roasted Turkey Legs are simmering away!

After 30 minutes remove the turkey legs/wing and either strain the turkey stock or use a slotted spoon to remove the large chunks of onion and carrot, which can be discarded. The turkey meat can be cut off the bone and served for a meal or in any recipe that calls for cooked chicken (you can cut it up and freeze it for later if desired). Pour this stock into a 2 cup measuring cup or medium sized bowl. After it cools a bit you can de-fat the stock by skimming off the fat that rises to the top.

Make the roux by melting the butter in a medium sized saucepan. Once melted (do not brown) add the olive oil and the flour. Turn off the burner and stir so that you cannot see any dry flour. Add the chicken broth and stir well. Use a whisk to rapidly mix the roux into the stock. Initially you will see some lumps but those will melt into the stock as you whisk. Cook over medium low heat for about 5-8 minutes while whisking constantly. Add salt and pepper to taste. Yield 3 cups.

This can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to 1 month.

To serve, heat the gravy in a pan on the stove, adding any pan drippings from the meat or poultry you are serving. Additional broth can be added if the gravy is too thick. This gravy will thicken a bit over time.

### **UnStuffed Stuffing**

(Based on a number of recipes including one from Sandee at [www.ThemePartyQueen.com](http://www.ThemePartyQueen.com))



- 1 pound of bulk Italian sausage
- 1 medium onion diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 1(12 ounce bag herbed stuffing bread cubes (i.e. Pepperidge Farm)
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 ¼ cups chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon poultry seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

Brown Italian sausage in a large skillet, breaking up the meat into small clumps as it cooks. When almost cooked, add diced onion and celery and continue to cook until sausage is fully cooked and veggies are somewhat softened. Blot or drain off excess fat. Pour this mixture into a large mixing bowl. Add remaining ingredients, stirring after each addition. Grease or butter a large casserole dish and pour the stuffing mixture into the dish. Cover with foil and Bake at 350°F for 60 minutes. Remove the foil and bake an addition 10 minutes or until top is crispy.

### **Roasted Sweet Potatoes**



3 cups peeled sweet potatoes cut into 1" cubes (about 2 large or 3 medium potatoes)

1 medium onion, diced (medium dice works great)

2 Tablespoons light olive oil

1 teaspoon salt

Place the cubed potatoes and diced onions on a large baking pan or rimmed cookie sheet. Pour olive oil and salt on top. Use your hands to toss and coat the veggies evenly with the olive oil. Spread out the veggies into a single layer. Bake at 450°F for 20-25 minutes. Half way through the baking time, use a spatula to turn the pieces over.

Serves 6.

### **Citrus Spinach Salad**



(Prep Time: 10 minutes)

10-12 cups baby spinach leaves (about a 9 ounce bag)

2 cups cherry tomatoes

1/4 red onion, thinly sliced

2 (11 ounce) cans mandarin oranges

2 (2.25 ounce) cans sliced black olives

Dressing (Revised):

½ cup extra light virgin olive oil

¼ cup balsamic vinegar (or more if desired)

1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 teaspoon granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon each, salt and black pepper

Combine dressing ingredients and set aside. Combine salad ingredients in a large bowl. Pour desired amount of dressing over salad and serve immediately. You probably will have a little dressing left over, depending on how much dressing you like in your salad

Serves 8-10

### Sautéed Green Beans



French Green Beans are thinner and the ends don't need to be snapped off - makes dinner easier!

(Prep Time: 5 minutes. Cooking Time: 10-12 minutes)

1 pound French green beans  
1 cup water  
1 Tablespoon butter  
3 cloves garlic minced  
½ teaspoon salt or to taste

1. Rinse green beans in cold water and drain
2. Place drained green beans in a large skillet and add water
3. Place skillet over medium heat and bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat to medium low
4. Uncover the pan and stir after 3 minutes, checking to make sure there is still water in the bottom of the pan. Continue to cook with the cover on for an additional 3 minutes. Again, keep an eye on the water level. At the end of 6 minutes you want there to be just a little water left in the pan, but not so little that the green beans scorch. If additional water is needed add ¼ cup.
5. After the beans have been cooking a total of 6 minutes with the cover on, take the cover off and add the butter, and garlic. Continue to cook uncovered for an additional 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until green beans are crisp tender.

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Stir in salt and serve.  
Serves: 4-6

### Fresh Cranberry Sauce Recipe



After making this fresh cranberry sauce recipe, I've never made the cooked variety again. I never cared for the canned version, so for years I made the traditional cooked cranberry sauce recipe by following the directions on the back of the bag of fresh berries. While that is good, this recipe is fantastic, and I highly recommend it. This is an easy dish to prepare several days in advance. I would recommend giving it a stir before serving

1 (12 ounce) package fresh cranberries  
1 medium orange  
3/4 cup sugar  
2 teaspoons grand marnier or cognac (optional and only if kids won't be eating this!)

Sort through the cranberries, discarding any that are really soft. While keeping the peel on, slice the orange into eight wedges removing any seeds. Place half of the cranberries and half of the orange wedges in a food processor. Pulse until ingredients are chopped but not pureed. Transfer the mixture into a mixing bowl. Repeat the chopping process with the other half of the orange wedges and cranberries. Add the sugar and cognac (if you adding this) to the mixture in the mixing bowl and stir. Add additional sugar if desired. Store covered in the refrigerator. Serve with holiday or turkey dinner. Makes 2.5 cups or about 10 servings.

## Traditional Pumpkin Pie



I'm a bit of a traditionalist and usually follow the recipe off of the can of Libby's canned pumpkin. That is the most important distinction. Many stores now carry canned pumpkin pie filling and canned pumpkin. They are not interchangeable. This recipe uses the canned pumpkin, not the filling

2 unbaked pie crusts (either make your own, buy frozen deep dish shells, or I often use Pillsbury brand rolled pie crusts

### Dry ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves

### Wet ingredients:

- 4 large eggs
- 1 (29 ounce) can pure pumpkin (I buy Libby's) or homemade pumpkin puree
- 2 (12 ounce) cans evaporated milk (do not use condensed milk)

Preheat the oven to 425°F oven

Prepare pie crusts if necessary. If using unbaked rolled pie crust dough, place it into a pie pan and flute the edges with your fingers. Set these aside.



Combine the dry ingredients in a small bowl and set aside. In a large bowl or stand mixer, beat the eggs. Mix in the canned pumpkin and the dry ingredient mixture. Gradually add the canned milk and mix well. Pour this mixture evenly into the two unbaked pie shells. Do not pour in more pumpkin mixture than the pie crusts can contain. When baking, this mixture will rise slightly.

Bake at 425°F for 15 minutes. Then reduce the temperature to 350°F for 40-50 minutes or until a knife inserted in the middle comes out clean. Cool for 2 hours then refrigerate until ready to serve. Serve with whipped cream

Yield two 9" pies

### Homemade Whipped Cream

There is a continuum when it comes to whipped cream. It ranges from readymade whipped topping in a tub, to whipped cream in a can, to homemade whipped cream. If you've never made homemade whipped cream, it's really easy, tastes fabulous, and is a really fun activity for kids to help with. Thanksgiving is a great time to "whip" this up! I will say, don't attempt this unless you have a hand mixer or a stand mixer.

### Homemade Whipped Cream

1 cup heavy whipping cream (1/2 pint container)

1-2 Tablespoons of granulated or confectioners' sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla (optional)

It's optimal if you place a metal bowl and beaters in the fridge or freezer for awhile making this. Optimal, but it's not critical. To pour the whipping cream into a bowl and

You can use your finger or a knuckle to flute the edges of an unbaked pie crust.

your  
before  
make,  
using

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a electric or stand mixer, beat until soft peaks form. This may take 3-5 minutes. You will have soft peaks when you lift the beaters out of the cream and peaks form and fall just a bit. Add the sugar and the vanilla if desired and mix. Serve immediately if possible. This can be made up to an hour ahead of time and refrigerated.

©2011 MakeDinnerEasy.com Grocery List –for Thanksgiving Turkey Dinner

Item	Turkey & Basting Sauce	Mashed Potatoes	Gravy	Stuffing	Sweet Potatoes	Citrus Spinach Salad	Green Beans	Cranberry Salad	Pumpkin Pie
<b>PRODUCE</b>									
Onions	1		1	1	1				
Garlic cloves	✓						✓		
Fresh rosemary & fresh sage	✓								
Lemon (optional)	✓								
Celery	✓			✓					
Russet potatoes (1 buy Idaho)		5#							
Sweet Potatoes					3				
Baby Spinach Leaves						✓			
Cherry tomatoes (2 cups)						✓			
Red onion						✓			
Fresh French Green Beans							✓		
Fresh Cranberries (12 ounce bag)								✓	
Orange								✓	
Carrot			✓						
<b>MEAT</b>									
Fresh or Frozen Turkey	✓								
3 pounds turkey legs and or turkey wings			✓						
Bulk Italian sausage				✓					
<b>IN THE AISLES</b>									
Chicken broth			9cups	2 cups					
Herbed stuffing bread cubes (12 ounces)				✓					
Poultry seasoning				✓					
Balsamic vinegar						✓			
Canned sliced black olives (2.25 ounce can)						2			
Canned mandarin oranges (11 ounce can)						2			
1 (29 ounce can) pure pumpkin puree									✓
Canned evaporated milk									2
Twine for securing the wings/legs	✓								
Ground cinnamon, ground ginger, and ground cloves									✓
Rubber cloves (optional)	✓								
Bakery Rolls									
<b>DAIRY</b>									
Unsalted butter	1.5 sticks								

Salted butter		1 stick					√		
Sour cream		1 cups							
Cream cheese		8 oz.							
Refridgerated pie dough or frozen pie shells									2
Whipping cream									√

**I'm assuming you have:** salt, black pepper, paprika, light olive oil, sugar, flour, eggs, Dijon mustard.

Note: Ingredients for optional turkey brine are not included; if you are going to brine the turkey you would also need a turkey brining bag, apple juice and kosher salt. Other items you may need are wine, beverages, and pickles and olives for relish trays if desired.

## Thanksgiving Crafts for Children

With all the cooking going on in the kitchen, it can be a big help to have the kids engaged. You can even keep them busy with activities that will help the cook or add a festive flare to the house.

### Helping in the Kitchen

Take a look at your menu in advance to see if there are any recipe steps that your kids, or kids that are attending your feast, can help with. This might include:

- Making the butter rub for the turkey
- Chopping up fresh rosemary for the basting sauce (scissors can also be used to cut this up)
- Separating the cauliflower into flowerettes for the salad
- Pressing the crust into the pan for the pie
- Snapping green beans (if you don't use French green beans)
- Making Homemade Whipped Cream

### Making Homemade Butter

This is an activity I used to teach my kid's pre-school and kindergarten classes. It's a fun activity if you have a large group of kids at your house. It will keep them busy for awhile and also teaches them about how food is made and where it comes from.

You will need a large jar with a tight lid, and a small container of cold whipping cream. Pour the cream into the jar and tightly secure the lid. Have the kids sit in a circle and sing this song while shaking the jar of whipping cream:

*I have a small container, I fill it up with cream, I'm going to make some butter like magic or a dream. So shake it baby shake it, shake with all your might, shake it, shake it, shake it, and pass it to your right!"*

When each kid receives the jar, they sing the song while shaking the jar. After they are done, they pass the jar to the right and the next person does the same thing. After 5-10 minutes the cream will start to solidify and will form into unsalted butter. It won't look like butter most kids are used to eating as there will not be any yellow dye added to it, but it is a fun lesson in how pilgrims might have made butter.

### Making place card holders

If you have a large group of people attending, your kids could help create a plan for where everyone should sit and make placecards. This could even be a simple piece of card stock paper with a person's name and some Thanksgiving stickers.



One year my kids make turkeys out of pine cones and pipe cleaners and set a small card in the pinecone with the persons name on it.

### Thanksgiving Conversation Cards

Years ago I purchased a Box of Thanksgiving Questions. This has become one of our family traditions to answer these questions at the dinner table. Each person at the table has to select a card, read the question and then everyone at the table takes their turn answering the question. You could purchase these or your kids (or adults) could make up a set of these cards with your own questions on heavy card stock paper. We have found the answers to these questions have sparked new understanding of people in our family. Some sample questions that you could use on these cards include:

- Name one thing you are thankful for this year?
- What is your favorite Thanksgiving memory?

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- Tell us about something that someone did for you that was very nice?
- Who is a person you should thank more often, and why?
- How did your grandparents and great-grandparents spend thanksgiving?
- What do you appreciate about the person on your left?

### Thanksgiving Prayers

Regardless of your religious affiliation, a great way to start off the Thanksgiving Meal is with a prayer or statement of thanksgiving. We like to have our kids do this, if possible. If it makes them feel more comfortable, having them practice it, or have it written on a card at the table may help with the jitters. This is one our kids learned in pre-school:

*Thank you for the world so sweet  
Thank you for the food we eat  
Thank you for the birds that sing  
Thank you God for Everything*

It's a nice touch to then have an adult add a statement of Thanksgiving for those that have gathered at the table or for anyone unable to attend,

### Tips & Reminders

- You don't have to go it alone! Involve your family or friends in the menu planning and recipe selection.
- If you are inviting people you don't know well it's important to check if they have any food allergies.
- If someone offers to bring something, take them up on it. Even someone who doesn't like to cook can bring the wine, or some veggies with dip for an appetizer.
- You don't need to tell people a specific time that dinner will be served. If you tell them "between 2:00 and 3:00" that will give you some extra time incase everything isn't ready when you want it to be.
- In the movies, an actor brings out a big beautiful turkey and carves it at the table. You don't have to do this! It might be less pressure on the person who carves the turkey to do this in the kitchen. That way the mess also stays in the kitchen.

- Don't throw out the turkey carcass. I usually have a jumbo sized zip-style bag on hand to freeze the carcass to make soup with later. If the carcass is really large, you can break it in two and store it in two different bag.

I wish you and your family a wonderful Thanksgiving. Remember, I can help you throughout the year with free weekly dinner menus and a grocery shopping list at [www.MakeDinnerEasy.com](http://www.MakeDinnerEasy.com).

*Crystal*