

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**Meal Management for Thanksgiving**  
**November 2025**

Managing a large holiday meal, like Thanksgiving, can be a daunting task. Figuring out how to utilize oven space, timing dishes and preparing the meal without wearing yourself out are all issues that need to be worked through before the big day. A little planning and organization can help you get a beautiful, delicious meal on the table and still be able to enjoy the day and the company.

First, plan ahead. Know your menu and purchase all of the non-perishable groceries you can a week or two in advance. If others are bringing dishes, make assignments. Putting a person in charge of the beverages, one on desserts and another on appetizers makes the day easier with just having to do the main dish and sides.



Here are the basics of planning for a roasted turkey. Allow about  $\frac{3}{4}$  - 1 pound per person for an 8-12 pound turkey. Larger birds (over 12 pounds) have more meat – allow  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound per person. If using a frozen turkey, make sure that you plan for thawing time. For a frozen unstuffed turkey (it is recommended to cook stuffing separately for food safety reasons), allow at least 24 hours for every 4-5 pounds. That means as much as 5-6 days for a 20-24 pound bird. Place on a tray in its original wrapper in the refrigerator. For faster thawing, you can submerge the turkey in its original wrapper (with no tears or holes) in cold tap water in a deep sink or large ice chest placed in a cool location. Change the water every 30 minutes planning on about 30 minutes per pound of turkey. Thawed turkeys can be held in the refrigerator 1-2 days before roasting. For roasting, cook to a minimum internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Check the temperature with a thermometer at the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Generally, it will take about 15 minutes per pound at 325 degrees F, but start checking periodically for the last 1-2 hours. Let the turkey rest for 20 minutes, covered loosely with foil.

Secondly, prep in advance. Many dishes, like pies and desserts and cranberry sauce can be made a day or two ahead. Setting the table can also be done well ahead of time and pull out all of the serving dishes and utensils needed. A time-consuming task is prepping the vegetables and chopping onions and celery and other ingredients. You can chop your vegetables a day or two ahead and store in airtight containers in the refrigerator. You can also toast nuts ahead of time.

Thirdly, time and space are everything. Create a cooking timeline, working back from the mealtime. Note when each dish needs to start cooking and then add your prep time. List critical points of action. Be sure to avoid having too many items that have to go in the oven or on the stovetop. Utilize slow cookers, air-fryers or multicookers to conserve oven and cooktop space. Many side dishes can be prepared in these small appliances, such as the Slow Cooker Creamed Corn below.

Lastly, keep it simple. Don't overcomplicate the menu, sticking to a few favorites instead of trying to make too much or all new recipes. Mix homemade and prepared or semi-homemade dishes. Put out one appetizer and some nuts and olives to keep guests happy while you finish cooking. And try to clean as you go to keep the

kitchen manageable. Remember the most important thing is spending time together and enjoying the people around the table.

For more information and recipes check out the Seasonal Eating page at [bedford.tennessee.edu](http://bedford.tennessee.edu).

### **Slow Cooker Creamed Corn**

48 ounces frozen corn

1/4 cup milk

1 tablespoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

8 ounces cream cheese, cut into cubes

1/2 cup butter, cut into cubes

Pour corn into slow cooker with milk, sugar, salt and pepper and stir together. Sprinkle the cream cheese and butter over the top. Cook on high for 2-4 hours or low for 4-6 hours. Remove lid and stir together. Adjust seasonings. Garnish with thyme leaves, if desired.