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Seems every Thanksgiving, there's more advice on how to cook turkey dinners than invitations to eat turkey dinners. All the cooks appear to know about such tricks as how the Louisiana French fry turkeys in washpots full of boiling peanut oil in one hour, or how Chef So-and-So at the Country Club puts his turkey in a 500 degree oven for one hour. After roasting in the dead oven for 10 hours, the turkey comes out tender as a squab pie resting on a delicate crust.

"The meat," they go on to say, "falls off the bone." "So," I think, "do the disasters served in cafeterias under the guise of being smothered turkey breast." Falls off the bone as tasteless as the boiled sailcloth shipwrecked sailors eat in the final stages of starvation.

A magazine you may know, named *Cook's Illustrated*, taught me how to roast turkey. So far I have used the recipe on six turkeys, (*Cook's* tested 46 turkeys) varying in weight from 12 to 21 pounds. Per instructions from the magazine, none have been the pre-larded birds, or so called butterball turkeys. One I bought on sale for 21 cents a pound; the others ranged somewhere around 59 cents a pound. All were frozen. All took five days to thaw in the refrigerator.

Be clear on this point. If you have a grudge against some of your holiday guests, go ahead and thaw the meat out on the kitchen cabinet. Let's say your mother-in-law has been in a particularly heavy-handed mood even for her outstanding ill temper. A good way to moderate the old gal's humor is to leave the turkey at room temperature overnight, or a tad longer. Just limit your nourishment to mashed potatoes or one of the fortified wines or malt beverages so popular around the holidays. One tip: as indelicate as it may seem, don't crowd Mom up so she can't leave the table in a hurry.

But to proceed, on the evening of the fifth day, place the turkey in two gallons of water in a bucket in which one cup of table salt or two cups of kosher salt has been added.

The marinade must be kept at 40 degrees or lower. The best way to get the turkey back in the refrigerator once the space is yielded is to have a Canada goose or wild turkey decoy the exact size of the turkey ready to slip in the refrigerator to hold the shelf room open.

The salt water, I am told by *Cook's Illustrated*, thaws out every little niche of frozen meat, plus seasons it at the same time. The salt water, I know by experience, causes the breast and the dark meat to be done at the same time. "Water absorbed by the marinating," the recipe explains, "acts as a heat conductor." I am convinced, however, the breast on a turkey soaked in salt water bakes as moist as the thigh. On my own, I've also tried the salt solution for a shorter period of time on Cornish game hens with the same results.

After eight hours in the brine, bathe the turkey the same way an automobile has to be doused after being down on the salt beaches on the coast. Spray and respray the outside and the inside of the turkey. (Keep the salt treatment foremost in mind when seasoning the dressing and gravy.) Start the oven heating to 400 degrees; place the oven rack at the lowest setting to keep from burning your hands adjusting this hot piece of steel. Throw all wet hot pads out in the backyard completely out of reach of the cook. Takes a few lessons to learn not to pick up hot plates with wet hot pads. Also, any audible human voices mean the kitchen is becoming crowded. Using a stiletto type dagger as a pointer, encourage all spectators to either go back to bed, or to take a long winter drive around town.

Next, if the bird is to be stuffed, the stuffing has to be too hot to hold in your hands to be safe from forming bacteria in the first hour of baking. I am not going to repeat this again. There is enough phony eggnog mix and fake fruit cake to make people sick on holidays without a half-cooked cook coming along and giving 12 people food poisoning. So take a scoop-like spoon and stuff the hot

dressing real loose inside the cavity. Use number five horseshoe nails and white cotton twine to lace up the openings. A fun thing to do at the table is to save the hot nails and burned string for Grandpa's or Mom's plate, depending on which one is delivering the loudest and longest sermon.

Instead of rubbing butter on the outside of the turkey like the recipe says, I use a pastry brush moistened in peanut oil. (The Pilgrims used otter fat diluted by poke weed to baste the first Thanksgiving turkey. Be thankful how far we have progressed.) Follow these instructions implicitly: place turkey breast down for one hour on a rack at 400 degrees, reduce temperature to 250 degrees for the next three hours and flip the breast side up for final browning at 400 degrees. The catch is your turkey may not take that much time, so use a meat thermometer. Should parts of the turkey start to brown too much, cover with cheesecloth soaked in peanut oil. The magazine says, (and they are right) "when the breast is close to 163 degrees, 180 degrees for the thigh and 165 degrees in the stuffing, the turkey will be perfectly flavorful and moist."