

Thanksgiving

I've been cooking Thanksgiving dinners for myself for many years (I like leftovers). Most years I write up a menu, to-do list etc and after it's over make notes on what I did right / wrong to help myself in future years. Here it all is:

Thanksgiving 2023

Menu

- Turkey
- Dressing
- Mashed Potatoes
- Gravy
- Popovers
- [Broccoli Cheese Rice Casserole](#)
- [Green Bean Casserole](#) (possibly wait until weekend)

Shopping List

- ✓ Bread Cubes for Stuffing
- ✓ Russet Potatoes
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Broccoli (3 to 4 large heads, 3.5 lbs)
- ✓ Scallions (4 bunches)
- ✓ Sharp Cheddar Cheese
- ✓ Ritz Crackers
- ✓ Rice
- ✓ Parsley
- ✓ Onions
- ✓ Small apples
- ✓ Dark Karo Syrup
- ✓ Lemons
- ✓ 1-1/2 lbs mushrooms
- ✓ Garlic
- King Arthur Flour
- ✓ Shortening for pie

Timeline

- 1) Monday
 - a) Brine Turkey Wings
- 2) Tuesday
 - a) Make Turkey Stock
 - b) Cut up Broccoli
 - c) Make Rice
 - d) Crush Ritz Crackers
 - e) [Dry Brine Turkey](#)
- 3) Wednesday
 - a) Make mashed potatoes
 - b) Make Broccoli Cheese Casserole except for topping
 - c) Make dressing
 - d) Make popover batter.
- 4) Thursday
 - a) Put turkey in oven.
 - b) Remove popover batter from fridge.
 - c) Just before mealtime
 - i) Put topping on the Broccoli Cheese Casserole and bake
 - ii) Put dressing in dish, pats of butter on top, cover and bake at 375F for half an hour or so. Remove cover and bake until crispy on top.
 - iii) Turn warming drawer on high and put in mashed potatoes.
 - iv) When turkey is done, remove and make gravy (of course)
 - v) Make popovers

Thanksgiving 2022

Two years ago I made a note to myself (below) telling me to just give up and don't bother making the huge Thanksgiving meal because it's just too exhausting. This year... I did it again. I really wanted turkey and dressing and gravy. Especially leftovers.

But – this time I decided to do it differently, specifically to make all the side dishes the day before as much as possible. So, on Tuesday I made turkey stock and on Wednesday the day before Thanksgiving I made most of everything else - the mashed potatoes, the dressing (I didn't stuff the turkey on Wednesday of course), prepared all the ingredients for the “Baked Cauliflower / Mozzarella” recipe that I love, and the batter for the popovers which should always be made the evening before anyway.

And on Thursday all I had to do was stuff the turkey and put it in the oven, make gravy when the turkey was done, bake the dishes I'd prepped on Wednesday and re-heat the mashed potatoes.

So unlike other years, when I sat down to eat I wasn't at all exhausted and was able to thoroughly enjoy the meal. I really didn't see that this method caused *any* change in quality. And after I was done eating I was feeling a little woozy due to the wine but still felt active enough to clean up the kitchen instead of just leaving it for later.

So, problem solved. In the future if I still want the Thanksgiving meal and leftovers without killing myself on Thanksgiving day, this is the way to go.

Dressing Important Note

This was my major discovery this year. I love dressing (more than anything else it's the reason I do the Thanksgiving meal), and I've been a dedicated believer that the dressing should go into the turkey, which I did this year as usual. Also as usual, I made more dressing than would fit in the turkey so I refrigerated the extra. In previous years by the time I ate all the leftovers I was burned out on dressing so I'd throw away the unused portion.

This year however after I ate all the dressing I decided to go ahead and bake the extra. I put it in a casserole, topped it with pats of butter, and baked it. The results were incredible, particularly because the top and bottom become crunchy and buttery and well just delicious.

So, Note To Self: Don't stuff the dressing into the turkey. Put it into a moderately shallow pan, cover it and bake at about 375 degrees for about 30 minutes, then remove the cover and continue baking until the top is nice and golden (warning – some recipes say to increase the temperature to 450F or so, I tried this but the top very quickly got nearly burned. It was still delicious). Not only is this better, it will greatly speed up the morning prep because all I'll have to do is shove the turkey in the oven. In fact, in order to meet my desired mealtime I will probably have to *delay* putting the turkey in the oven instead of rushing to get it in as quickly as possible.

Here are the details:

Menu:

- Turkey (12-1/2 lb), dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy
- Baked Cauliflower with Mozzarella and Olives
- Popovers

Process:

Tuesday

Made turkey stock:

Once again the only turkey wings I could find were frozen in packs of two, so on Monday starting at noon I brined two packs (four wings) and two turkey thighs,

using ½ cup salt per gallon of water. By bedtime they were thawed enough so I could separate the wings. By Tuesday morning they were totally thawed.

So Tuesday morning I cut the wings into three pieces each and attempted to brown them in skillets with a little oil. That didn't work particularly well because only the part of the wing that was actually in contact with the pan changed color, which was only a few spots. Probably be better to roast them like I have in previous years, being careful not to dry them out in the process like seemed to be the problem in 2020.

I also chunked up two medium onions and browned them a little bit in the oil (do not try to make "grilled" onions, just brown the outside a little bit).

I recently bought an All-Clad stockpot so I used it for the stock – threw in the wings, onions, two or three stalks celery cut up, two or three carrots cut up, two bay leaves, some thyme, three or four cloves, and some peppercorns tied up in cheesecloth. Then poured in enough water to submerge everything.

I then tried something different this year – I brought the pot to a simmer but instead of simmering it on the stovetop all day, I put it in the oven at 225F. This worked really well – I didn't have to monitor it all day long to keep a simmer and the results were great.

The stockpot was put in the oven around 10am. Around 7pm I added the two turkey thighs. Around 8:30pm I removed the pot from the oven, put the thighs in the fridge, and then filtered out the remaining solids. Salted the broth and ended up with a lot, which was delicious.

One comment – go lightly on the salt. The gravy ended up a little too salty, possibly due to the drippings from the turkey which I had also brined.

Wednesday

I pretty much made everything I could on Wednesday. I wasn't able to get started until noon because I had other stuff going on in the morning. However, I was free to take my time, I didn't have to rush around to get everything done like I would if I were preparing everything on Thanksgiving Day. So it was much more relaxed. Details:

Turkey - put the turkey into the brine around noon, ½ cup salt per gallon of water. Threw out the giblets as usual.

Baked Cauliflower w/Mozzarella – I prepped all the ingredients:

- I cut up the cauliflower and simmered it for about 8 minutes. Note to self – that was too long, try five minutes next time. I then layered the cauliflower between paper towels and refrigerated it.
- I also made the tapenade dressing, which required mincing anchovies and capers, pressing garlic and stirring it in olive oil along with some red pepper flakes. Put that in fridge.
- Grated the pecorino / parmesan cheese and refrigerated it.

Mashed Potatoes – in the past I've read that mashed potatoes don't reheat well, but this year I found several recipes for "make ahead mashed potatoes". So I made the

mashed potatoes on Wednesday using a weird recipe from America's Test Kitchen which among other things calls for steaming chunks of potatoes for ten minutes, rinsing them to remove starch and steaming again until done. I riced them and gently mixed with half-and-half cream and butter (heated), then put in refrigerator.

Dressing – I completely made the dressing and refrigerated:

- During the day I shredded the meat from the turkey thighs.
- Early evening - melted four and a half sticks of butter in my largest frypan and stirred in two medium-large chopped onions and about six stalks of chopped celery.
- Cooked until onions were very soft and then stirred in large amount of minced sage (two packages), salt and pepper. Cooked for a few more minutes to infuse the mixture with the sage.
- Emptied one bag of breadcubes into a large pot, stirred in the butter / onion / celery mixture along with most of the meat from the thighs. Then heated up some of the turkey stock and mixed it into the stuffing until fairly moistened. Put into container and refrigerated it.

Popover batter – I have a great recipe for popovers which highly recommends making the batter the night before. The batter only contains eggs, milk, flour and salt so it takes no time at all to make.

Thursday

Because of “Wednesday”, Thursday was a much easier day:

- a) First thing in the morning, removed the turkey from the brine and rinsed and dried it. I heated a bunch of stuffing in the microwave before stuffing the turkey – America's Test Kitchen says if you just *have* to cook the stuffing in the turkey then it helps guarantee it's fully cooked if you pre-heat it. My stuffing had been refrigerated overnight so it was very cold anyway. Turkey was in oven by 9:30am, probably could have been in much sooner but I slept in.
- b) Removed the popover batter from the refrigerator about two hours before turkey was done. It stayed at room temperature for longer than usual, which I believe helped a lot.
- c) I have an appliance in my kitchen called a “warming drawer”, when turned up to high it actually gets the contents very hot. So about an hour before the turkey was done I removed the mashed potatoes from the refrigerator and put about half of them (one generous serving) in a heatproof container, covered with foil and put in the warming drawer set to 2-1/2 (it goes up to 3).
- d) When turkey was done I removed it from the oven and let it sit, covered with foil.
- e) Meanwhile I turned up the oven to 375F and removed all the ingredients for the Cauliflower casserole from the refrigerator. I first had to slice up one pound of fresh mozzarella (I decided not to do that ahead of time), and I also had to tear up 12 black olives (ditto). Then I assembled the casserole and stuck it in the oven.

- f) Next, turned on the small side-oven to 450F to pre-heat for the popovers.
- g) Next, removed the stuffing from the turkey, put in a bowl, covered with foil and placed in the warming drawer. I also moved the turkey to the cutting board and covered it with foil.
- h) Next, made the gravy using some of the turkey stock which I heated up in a pan. I won't go into details on the gravy, I make it using the pan drippings from the roasted turkey, making a roux with the turkey fat and using the stock and drippings for the gravy. The gravy was very good although a little salty, possibly due to the drippings from the brined turkey. It would be better to use less salt when making the stock. Ended up with lots of gravy, enough to fill one and half containers. Full container went in the fridge (leftovers) and the other into the warming drawer.
- i) Next, made the popovers. They require baking at 450F for ten minutes, turning down the heat to 350F, and baking about 20 more minutes. In the past this sometimes resulted in the edges of the popovers being nearly burned. This year when I turned the oven down to 350F I also opened the oven door for a couple minutes to immediately lower the temperature. The popovers ended up being the best I've ever made – extremely tall (probably because I left the batter at room temperature for much longer than usual) and perfectly browned.
- j) Meanwhile I carved the turkey. The cauliflower casserole was done while carving the turkey so turned off the oven and opened the door to cool it down some.
- k) At this point – everything was done. I moved everything from the warming drawer to the table just as the popovers were finished baking (they're really best if hot). Ate.

I really did not notice that making everything a day ahead resulted in any loss of quality. It turned out that reheating the mashed potatoes in the warming drawer worked extremely well, and everything else was outstanding.

One Additional Note: Dessert

My menu did not include dessert (i.e., the traditional “pie”). I just don't see the point when there's so much food you end up stuffing yourself and can't eat anything else. But I do think a “holiday” should include pie, so – I made vanilla ice cream on Friday and an apple pie on Saturday. Warm fruit pie alamode is a major weakness of mine, and once I learned to make ice cream I'm not satisfied with store bought. Best Thing Ever.

Conclusion

Because I did so much work ahead of time, this was possibly the best Thanksgiving I've ever made for myself. I didn't end up eating at 8pm, I wasn't too exhausted to enjoy the food, and everything was delicious. I'm still not convinced that it's worth all the work even when spread out over three days, but it's only once a year and if I really feel like I want a turkey / dressing / gravy type meal (which I love) then this is the way to do it.

2020

NOTE TO FUTURE SELF: Joe, just... don't bother. It's nearly 7pm and I've been on my feet all day (see menu below). I went way out of my way to organize everything to be as efficient as possible, and I'm utterly exhausted for a meal that was just okay. It just is not worth the trouble. Buy a nice rib roast, make a few favorite sides. I made a beautiful meal today with all the very nice sides and it was just okay. Screw it. Spend the day making a single pecan pie and you'll be just as happy.

This year was special, because on the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving I got the new puppy Ansel the St Bernard. So I'm working around him too. This year's menu:

- Turkey – pre-ordered a week ahead from HyVee, 15-1/2 lbs
- Dressing, Gravy, Mashed Potatoes – the usual
- Baked Cauliflower w/Mozzarella and Olives – One of my favorite recipes from NY Times. The recipe actually calls for Romanesco Broccoli, but the description says it originated with cauliflower and since that's much easier to find that's what I use.
- Gruyere Dutch Baby – savory dutch baby with gruyere cheese
- Green bean casserole – sure, why not

Wednesday

As I now do every year, I made turkey stock from turkey wings. The only wings I could find were pretty much frozen, and I couldn't find any turkey thighs for the stuffing so I bought turkey legs (also frozen). In order to thaw the four wings quickly I brined them beginning Tuesday night, using the same ratio of 1 gallon water to 1/2 cup salt. This morning they were mostly thawed. I separated them into three pieces (each) and browned in some hot oil using two frypans and my stock pot. One large onion chunked up, couple carrots, three celery sticks, peppercorns, bay leaves, thyme, and some whole cloves. Had it on the stovetop by about 10 am. I used my new stove's "low simmer" setting where it intermittently turns the burner on and off, this seemed to work really well. I didn't brine the three turkey legs but they were mostly thawed by early evening, I added them to pot around 6:00pm, and simmered until 7:30. Shredded the turkey leg meat to add to dressing, I really think thighs work better. The stock is absolutely delicious.

Around 10pm I made the batter for the dutch baby and put in fridge. The dutch baby puffs up much better if the batter is made the night before.

Before going to bed I laid out all the stuff I'd need in the morning, so I could get the turkey in the oven ASAP.

Thursday

Got started around 7:45am, and got the turkey in the oven by 9:30. I aggressively started all the sides while the turkey was roasting. Turkey out of oven around 1:30 – 2pm, and I probably was eating around 3:30pm. But the entire day was spent

putting dishes together. See note above. Right now it's 6:40pm, I've drank one bottle of sparkling wine (domestic champagne) and part of another, and I'm exhausted. I've done a little clean up but will probably wait until tomorrow before really getting anything done. I just don't know...

2019

Okay, it's been several years since I updated this but that's mostly because every year has pretty much been the same as the previous. I decided to continue the tradition this year because I'm bored and felt like typing something.

Wednesday 11:47am:

As I do every year I am making turkey stock from four turkey wings (two packages). I cut the wings up into individual sections and roasted them at 375deg for about two hours. I didn't get them in the oven until 8:30am because I was up until 4am playing *Breath of the Wild* and slept in a little later than usual. I roasted them on one of my rimmed sheet pans, I was concerned the wings may render too much liquid and overflow the shallow rim but that wasn't remotely a problem. The wings ended up highly browned and quite crispy. I'm simmering them in my 10 qt stock pot. Dumped in the wings, two carrots cut up, two celery stalks cut up, one small onion cut up (I didn't remove all the paper skin), three cloves, two bay leaves, sprig of thyme, and small bunch of pepper corns. I covered this with water that I'd previously brought to a boil. The hot water together with the wings being hot directly out of the oven make it very quick and easy to bring the pot to a simmer. I also used hot water to deglaze the baking sheet. After all this the stock pot is only about 1/2 full of liquid, I have some concerns this will be enough although it will likely be a very strong stock and may benefit from thinning out anyway.

Many people recommend making the stock from the giblets and turkey neck, which is how my parents did it. That's just not enough material, you end up with only a small amount of stock without much flavor. By using turkey wings I'll end up with a gallon or two of extremely flavorful stock. I throw the giblets away.

Wednesday 1:30pm

Put the turkey in a brine made from 3 gallons water and 1-1/2 cups salt. I don't really brine the turkey so much for the flavor, it accomplishes something that I've never seen discussed in the cooking world – it normalizes the temperature of the turkey.

If you thaw a frozen turkey according to standard instructions, it will feel thawed but when you pull out the giblets and the neck you'll still find ice crystals on them. This means the inside of the turkey is still very cold or frozen, presumably including the bones. I buy a "fresh" turkey on Monday or Tuesday – "Never Frozen!" – but I still find ice crystals on the inside. Evidently it's not really been "frozen" but it was kept in below-freezing temperatures so it's "Not Frozen" frozen as opposed to "Frozen" frozen. Whatever.

Anyway if you remove the giblets and dunk the entire turkey in a cold brine and refrigerate it overnight, the brine surrounds the turkey, fills the inside cavity and

basically brings the entire thing to a standard temperature so *none* of it is still frozen. Evidence for this is that when you put the turkey in the roasting pan it is very “relaxed” – the legs sort of flop outwards and the legs and wings can all be wiggled easily. Before I brined them the appendages would feel very stiff. The end result is you’re not trying to roast a bird with a still frozen center and you don’t overcook and dry out the breast as much.

Wednesday 6:30pm

Dropped 3 turkey thighs in the simmering stock. I’ll let them simmer for an hour or two, remove them, let them cool slightly and then shred the meat. I like adding turkey meat to the dressing. Old family tradition, although my parents used the giblets instead.

Saturday 8:25am

Post mortem.

The turkey stock did turn out to be less than expected. As described above I heavily roasted the turkey wings until they were quite dark and crunchy. When I put them in the stock pot I noticed that they didn’t seem to fill the pot like usual, so they didn’t take as much water to cover. I now think that the long roasting caused them to lose a lot of moisture and shrink. Also, although the stock was very good it didn’t seem to have a strong “turkey” taste like I remember. OTOH it turned out that I had more than enough stock for both the gravy and the stuffing, both of which turned out great.

Slept in Thursday so the turkey didn’t get in the oven until around 11am. For my main “side” I made a cauliflower dish based on an old Sicilian recipe that I found on NY Times. Actually, the Times recipe used Romanesco Broccoli instead of cauliflower (it’s called Baked Romanesco Broccoli with Mozzarella and Olives), but the description says it originally was made with cauliflower and cauliflower would work fine. It’s a fabulous recipe, one of my favorite finds in several years. I started making it an hour before estimated time for turkey being done.

For some reason this year it took much longer getting everything made and the meal “on the table”, even though I took several steps to try and make it *faster*:

- I made fewer side dishes. In the past, I very likely would have added mac-and-cheese and the traditional green bean casserole to the list. This year it was just the baked cauliflower dish, popovers and of course mashed potatoes, which is pretty minimal for me.
- I laid out all the ingredients and even utensils and mixing bowls ahead of time so everything was ready to go
- I tried to be more aggressive in starting side dishes earlier. I’ve always been reluctant to make them too early and just let them sit around in the warming drawer for a couple hours but I decided to do it.

Despite my best efforts I believe the completed turkey was probably sitting around for 1-1/2 hours while I made the sides, before I reached the point where it

was ready to carve. I attribute this to three post-turkey preps, including two side dishes that I still stubbornly refused to make until the last minute, (even though each of them require over half an hour): 1) Gravy, which of course can't be made until the turkey comes out of the oven. It was the first thing I made but I didn't put it in the warming drawer and I actually had to re-heat it at mealtime which has never happened before. 2) Mashed potatoes, which I've read shouldn't sit around long. Screw that, next time I'll make them while the turkey is still roasting. 3) Popovers. One of my favorite things and these really are best when eaten hot out of the oven.

I guess the bottom line is I'm still single-threading too many tasks once the turkey is out of the oven: making gravy, making mashed potatoes, making the popovers, carving the turkey.

It probably didn't help that I started drinking a bottle of wine clear back when I made the cauliflower dish. By the time I sat down to eat I had finished the entire bottle and started on a second. I don't think I'm as efficient in that situation.

As for the final results, well it was fantastic. I don't know if it was the brining but the turkey wasn't at all dry. Despite misgivings about the turkey stock the gravy was outstanding, mashed potatoes were great, popovers were great. And I really do love the baked cauliflower dish.

Today is Saturday. If I can get myself to do it I will make a pecan pie. I don't make pies for Thanksgiving because I have too much ridiculous food as it is and would never be able to eat dessert. But making a pie a day or two later actually works out well because it adds something new instead of just eating more leftovers.

One final note, the Friday after Thanksgiving happened to be Jericho's two-year birthday. So of course he got an extra-special birthday meal.

2014

About the same as 2013. The turkey I bought had an enormous amount of fat and I ended up making a huge amount of gravy – used up all the turkey broth and had to use chicken stock for liquid. I bought sage at the store (been a cold fall). Three small onions, most of a head of celery again for the stuffing, with five melted sticks of butter. On the whole not a very interesting Thanksgiving.

2013

Things I forgot to buy: Believe it or not, butter. I was almost out. Fortunately I found out about 8pm Wednesday night and made a quick trip to buy some.

Turkey – 15.15 lb fresh turkey. I ordered it about five days ahead of time from Hy-Vee. Brined it overnight using 3 gals water and 1-1/2 cups salt. I didn't have a brining bag.. Turkey was brining in the fridge around noon. Threw away giblets.

Turkey stock – I like mixing shredded turkey meat in with the dressing, but I've quit fooling around with the giblets so nowadays I use the turkey stock process both for

making stock and for cooking turkey pieces. Problem is, the stock simmers for 6 hours or so, by which time the meat on the turkey pieces are tasteless mush. This year I decided to make the broth using turkey wings and then add a couple turkey thighs near the end, with the intention of using the turkey thigh meat for the dressing. This actually worked really well. I bought two packs of turkey wings (four wings total) and one pack of turkey thighs (two thighs). For the wings, I separated the three sections, and on a couple of wings hacked the largest section in two. Trying something new, I roasted the wings in the oven at 375deg for a couple hours until they got well browned (using the largest roasting pan). Deglazed the pan into the larger stockpot, and with the wings used two small onions, couple carrots, couple celery stalks, three bay leaves, bunch of thyme, peppercorns and 3 cloves. Simmered until 8pm at which time I added the two turkey thighs, and then simmered for another 2-1/2 hours. I put all the meat pieces in the fridge, strained, seasoned, and refrigerated the broth. It was extremely good. Couple comments: season carefully, I was at the borderline of making the broth too salty. Also, should have bought the turkey pieces on Tuesday so I could have gotten started Wednesday morning early. Instead I didn't get finished until 11:30pm and was too tired to shred the thigh meat, so I had to shred the meat for the dressing the next morning.

Dressing – chopped most of a head of celery, three fairly small onions, cooked in five sticks butter. Added pepper and tons of sage. We've had many below-freezing days this year, the sage maybe was a little "gone", possibly should have bought some. Used with one large bag of breadcubes from No Frills (Hy-Vee was selling bags about half that size. As usual this ended up making tons of dressing and had to store the rest in one of the largest Tupperware-type containers.. Added all the shredded turkey thigh meat and enough broth to moisten. I did not heat up the dressing this year before stuffing the turkey; it's a relatively smaller turkey and the dressing was already pretty hot from the onion/celery/butter and the broth.

Roasting – I got it in the oven by 9:30. I covered with aluminum foil and tied off with string, somewhat more successfully than last year. Plan is to remove the foil two hours before the "Better Homes and Garden" cookbook total-time recommendation. The tight foil wrap seems to cut at least one hour off the cooking time.

2011

Things I forgot to buy: Saltine crackers for the scalloped corn. Probably needed more eggs.

Turkey – Around 21 lb fresh turkey from Hy-Vee bought on Tuesday morning – the size choices were either 10-12lbs or over 20lbs. I brined it in the large stockpot using 3gals water and nearly 2 cups salt, and when I put the turkey in the stockpot it overflowed all over the counter. I didn't have a brining bag.. Turkey was brining in the fridge around 5:30pm. Threw away giblets.

Turkey broth – starting Wed around 4pm. Hy-Vee didn't have any wings so I bought a pack of two turkey thighs and one of three wings, hacked them up, browned in smaller "large pot" and big frypan which I deglazed into stock pot. One hacked-up onion, two carrots, two celery stalks, 3 bay leaves, bunch of thyme from the garden, peppercorns, 3 cloves. Simmered until midnight, strained and refrigerated, shredded meat. The stock was very good.

Dressing – chopped all but two center stalks of a head of celery, three fairly small onions, cooked in six sticks butter. Added salt, pepper, tons of sage. Used with two bags of breadcubes again which doesn't seem like much but was plenty. Added about half the shredded turkey meat and broth to moisten. I heated up the stuffing for the cavity. Leftover dressing fit in medium size rectangular Ziploc plastic container.

Roasting – I really didn't do much to get ready Wed night, and I didn't get started Thursday morning until around 8:35, but the turkey ended up in the oven by 10:15 anyway. I covered with aluminum foil and tried to tie off with string – the heavy duty aluminum foil is hard to seal with string, some holes were poked through. As of this writing don't know how well it will work.

2010

Things I forgot to buy: sweet potatoes and heavy-duty aluminum foil

Turkey – 19.26 lb fresh turkey from Hy-Vee on Tuesday around 3pm. I brined it using the Best Recipe recipe of 2gallons water / 1 cup table salt. I also used a brining bag (I bought 2 last year) which seemed more convenient than I remember, maybe because I thought to use clips to hold it to the side of my biggest stock pot. Turkey was brining in the fridge around 5pm. Threw away giblets.

Turkey broth – starting Wed around 2pm, I hacked up two turkey wings and browned in larger “big pot” and big frypan which I deglazed into stock pot. Added one hacked up onion and cooked for a while, two stalks celery and I think three carrots, thyme, two bay leaves, and peppercorns. Simmered until 11pm, strained through cheesecloth and put downstairs. Shredded wing meat. After using to moisten dressing I had a LOT left over so it went in smaller rectangular container (the rather flat one).

Dressing – chopped the remaining head of celery (left over from broth), one and a half very large onions. Cooked in six sticks butter. Added salt and pepper and lots of sage. Used with two bags of breadcubes from HyVee. Added shredded turkey from wings and broth to moisten, although for some reason this year very little broth was needed. I stuffed the neck cavity and then heated a bunch of dressing before stuffing the main cavity. Leftover dressing barely fit into the large round container (the old one with the beige lid).

Roasting – On Wed night I set out everything I would need – pots, pans, onions, etc. I also picked all the sage and put in plastic bag in fridge. Thursday I started around 8:20am. For some reason I had the turkey in the oven by 10:20am which is a little earlier than last year despite starting an hour later. Again I covered with aluminum foil and tied off with string, but since I didn't get any heavy-duty foil I had to fold together three lengths of regular foil. Roasting downstairs on lowest rack position.

2009

Things I forgot to buy: cheesecloth

Turkey – I bought an 18-1/2 lb fresh turkey from Whole Foods on Wednesday (around noon). It was good, biggest problem was very little fat was rendered. Generated about 6 cups of liquid. I brined the turkey starting around 6pm Wed night, using the “Best

Recipe” recipe of 1 cup salt per 2 gallons water. I used a brining bag (also bought from Whole Foods), which was moderately convenient. Threw away giblets.

Turkey Broth – starting Wed around noon I hacked up two turkey wings and browned in stock pot (also in big frypan which I deglazed into stock pot). Also cooked a large onion hacked up, few celery stalks and carrots, covered with water, added some bay leaves, and forgot to add peppercorns. Simmered until late at night. I didn’t have any cheesecloth so I strained it through fine strainer, seasoned and then refrigerated. It actually only made about 6 cups of broth (not too much), but this turned out to be much more than needed for the dressing and the gravy. Shredded the meat from the wings and also refrigerated.

Dressing – I used two bags of breadcubes from HyVee, which was far more than would fit inside turkey (possibly twice as much as needed). The flavorings consisted of six sticks of butter, in which I sauteed one and a half onions chopped and nearly an entire pack of celery chopped. Added salt and pepper and a LOT of minced sage. This seemed like the right amount for two bags of breadcubes. I tossed with the breadcubes and added the shredded meat from the turkey wings, then reheated the turkey broth and moistened the stuffing. As I say, this was probably about twice what I could stuff in the turkey. The leftover is in the medium size rectangular “Tupperware-like” container.

Roasting the Turkey – I started doing the prep work for the dressing around 7:30 am, which allowed me to get the turkey in the oven by 10:30am and eat dinner around 5pm. After various considerations I opted to roast the turkey breast-side-up at 325 deg in the largest roasting pan but I TIGHTLY covered the pan with foil to simulate Dad’s covered roaster. I first created a large piece of heavy-duty foil by placing two pieces on top of each other and folding over (crimping) them together along one edge, and then unfolding them like opening a book. I put four of those little skewers in the top of the turkey to hold the foil off it and then put the huge piece of foil over it. I folded the foil around the pan and then wrapped a long piece of twine around the pan and foil TWICE and TIGHTLY tied the twine to hold the foil. This seemed to create a VERY good tight lid; when I opened it a huge burst of steam came out. TIMING – Better Homes and Gardens says 5-1/2 to 6-1/2 hours for 18 lb. Best Recipe says 160 degrees for meat and maybe 165 for dressing. I took the foil off the turkey after 4-1/2 hours and by then the thighs had become loose, breast meat measured 140 degrees. One hour later (5-1/2 total) the breast meat was up to 175 and the stuffing to 170. SUGGEST that I move everything up by one hour (or at least 45 minutes), turkey was probably overdone. I DO think it was much less dry than the open roasting I’ve always done in the past.

Gravy – Like I said, very little fat was rendered (perhaps ¼ to ½ cup). I ended up adding one stick butter and some leftover butter from another stick. For the liquid, I used all the rendered liquid (about 6 cups) plus a little of the leftover turkey broth. Despite the lack of turkey fat, the gravy turned out very good.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS – I made bread using the cibatta recipe which turned out just like every other bread recipe I make. Also made mashed potatoes / gravy using ½ of the Best Recipe recipe (2lbs potatoes, etc). Green bean casserole using 18 oz of fresh green beans which I sliced diagonal and cooked 9 minutes, the casserole was very good. Also used up some leftover frozen scalloped corn.

CONCLUSIONS – Generally everything worked well. Getting everything underway EARLY in the morning was great, it meant I wasn't eating at 8pm like usual. Turkey takes LESS TIME when tightly covered in this manner. I aggressively kept cleaning kitchen utensils throughout (I ran the dishwasher twice before the turkey was cooked), and as a result the kitchen ended up with surprisingly little clutter after I ate. Actually, there was so much food that I didn't bother heating up the leftover scalloped corn until the next day, and I didn't even get around to slicing the bread.

2008

Menu:

Turkey

Dressing

Gravy

Mashed Potatoes

Green Bean Casserole

Scalloped Corn

Popovers

Sweet Potatoes

Spinach Salad w/Hot Bacon Dressing

Banana Bread

Broccoli Slaw

Day after comments

As is usual, the tried-and-true recipes were successful and the new ones were not. Timing-wise, my timetable was so-so. I really should start making the stuffing at 8am; I didn't get the turkey in the oven until around 11am and probably ate around 8pm. The scalloped corn casserole takes quite a while to assemble even with all the ingredients pre-measured. The scalloped corn and green bean casseroles were done long before time to eat, probably could go into the oven later. For some reason the turkey STILL ends up sitting around for two hours after being removed from oven. I probably should make EVERYTHING prior to removing it – all the casseroles, the popovers, potatoes, etc.

Specific comments on recipes:

Turkey – 16 lbs. I brined the turkey the night before, 10 quarts of water with 2-1/2 cups salt and 1-1/4 cups sugar (using my big stock pot). Seemed to turn out pretty good doing that. I relied on the popup timer; the roasting time was less than the minimum time shown in the Better Homes cookbook. Probably should remove the foil two hours before time. For some reason, the foil stuck to the turkey skin in a couple places and the foil actually BURNED into the skin.

Turkey Broth – day before, I made turkey broth using two turkey wings (chopped into large chunks), onion, carrot, celery, bay leaf, thyme, some parsley, peppercorns, and added giblets about an hour before it was finished (I didn't use the liver). Was pretty good, probably put in too much celery and carrots.

Dressing – about 1-1/2 onions, slightly more celery (most of one bunch), a LOT of sage, and two sticks of butter. Used about 1-1/2 bags of Hy-Vee dried bread cubes. Used the turkey broth and meat from turkey wings and giblets. Dressing was very good.

Mashed Potatoes – I used the “Creamy Mashed Potatoes” recipe on my website. 4 lbs of potatoes was way too much, so I used 3lbs. I also know from prior experience that the cream and butter is way, way too much, you end up with creamy potato soup, so I cut it in half - for the 3lbs of potatoes I used ¾ cup cream and 6 tbs butter. That was just about perfect.

Green Bean Casserole – standard Campbells, it was fine. I didn’t have it on my website because I was relying on the Internet, and it turns out the Campbells website was inaccessible (kind of funny). I’ve added it to my website. I used a 16oz bag French-cut green beans; I thawed them in the bag and then cut a corner off the bag and squeezed out all the liquid. I think that helped a lot.

Scalloped corn – I used the frozen creamed corn I made from my garden. When thawed, it is mostly just corn, very little liquid. The mix was too dry, so I ended up adding some more milk to make it more liquid. I don’t know whether that really matters but it was very good anyway.

Popovers – Martha’s recipe for blue cheese / thyme popovers is nearly identical to Cook’s Kitchen except for the instructions (Martha’s is designed for mini-muffin tins). I therefore used her ingredients but followed Cook’s Kitchens instructions, and the result was lousy. They didn’t rise at all, ended up with little lumps of dough. Perhaps the blue cheese screws it up. Someone needs to go into detail on popovers – what causes them not to rise? Is the dough too thin? Is it overworked too much? Does it work better if it’s cold, or what? I’ve made popovers before moderately successfully, I think it was using a recipe of Emerils (this was before I was keeping recipes online). As I recall, it had a much bigger ratio of eggs to milk; they rose quite well, but had a slightly leathery texture, possibly due to the eggs.

Sweet potatoes – baked at 400 deg for an hour or so. Terrific.

Spinach Salad – I used the Cook’s Kitchen recipe and it was terrible. Way, way, way, way, WAY too much vinegar, the dressing made it almost inedible.

Banana Bread – I used the old family favorite recipe, but I doubled it. I filled the bread pans about 2/3’s, and didn’t have hardly any batter left over. For some reason it turned out better than it probably ever has – it rose a little more and was a little lighter. Perhaps it’s because I used my heavy duty KitchenAid stand mixer, and was better able to cream the sugar and shortening, or something.

Broccoli slaw – I couldn’t find any unsalted sunflower seeds, so I used salted. It turned out okay, although it really is better to use unsalted.

Timeline:

Wednesday

- Make Banana Bread
- Make turkey broth from turkey wings
- Make Broccoli Slaw

- Cook 3 eggs for spinach salad
- Slice bacons for spinach salad, scalloped corn
- Slice red onion for spinach salad
- Wash dishes
- Empty dishwasher and clean kitchen
- Start Brining Turkey (right before bedtime)
- Set out ingredients and pans for stuffing

Thursday

- Make stuffing and stuff turkey
- Chop onion for scalloped corn
- Crush saltines for scalloped corn
- Pull scalloped corn from freezer, thaw in sink
- About two hours prior to turkey
 - Make scalloped corn (refrigerate)
 - Make green bean casserole (also refrigerate)
 - Measure out ingredients for popovers
 - Measure ingredients for gravy
 - Measure ingredients for spinach salad
 - Put out pans and kitchen timers (one for potatoes, popover pans, bowl for popover batter, dutch oven for spinach salad, quart measurer for gravy, small pan for cream and butter for mashed potatoes, bowls for turkey dressing, potatoes, spinach salad, plate for turkey, put out placesetting)
 - Clean kitchen
- JUST BEFORE turkey comes out
 - Pull remaining turkey broth from fridge for gravy (or grab chicken broth)
 - Peel garlic
 - Set out potatoes and potato peeler
 - Take dogs out
- When turkey comes out
 - Put green bean and scalloped corn casseroles in ovens
 - Make popover recipe and let set for ½ hour; preheat oven
 - Peel potatoes
 - Start cooking potatoes
 - Make gravy
 - Fry bacon for spinach salad
 - Put popovers in oven
 - Start heating cream / butter for potatoes
 - Mash potatoes
 - Carve turkey
 - Finish spinach salad
 - Pull popovers
 - Eat

Closing comments: I think probably would be best to get everything done before the turkey comes out. Turkey sat for nearly two hours while I finished all the other side