

A warmer, calmer Thanksgiving

Your illustrated planning workbook: checklists, a customizable timeline, oven scheduling, recipes, guest jobs, and a gentle cleanup plan.

Host: _____ Date: _____

Dinner time: _____ Number of guests: _____

The three things that matter most to us

Your preparation countdown

7-5 DAYS OUT · GET ORGANIZED

- Confirm guests, allergies, dietary preferences, and meal time
- Choose the menu and assign any potluck dishes
- Check pantry, fridge space, roasting pan, thermometer, and chairs
- Create one shopping list and a make-ahead plan

4-3 DAYS OUT · FINAL SHOPPING

- Buy shelf-stable ingredients, drinks, and serving supplies
- Confirm turkey thawing plan and refrigerator space
- Gather centerpiece items, foil, containers, and labels

2 DAYS OUT · KITCHEN PREP

- Prepare cranberry sauce and other make-ahead components
- Chop vegetables safely and refrigerate in covered containers
- Make pie dough or bake a dessert; organize casserole ingredients

1 DAY OUT · SET UP

- Set the table, label serving dishes, and chill drinks
- Finish appropriate make-ahead dishes and confirm oven schedule
- Check guest jobs, clean entryway, and get some rest



Your master holiday plan

Build the plan around your actual kitchen and serving time—not a rigid clock.

Guest / household	Food needs or notes	Contribution / task
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Menu map

Course	Dish	Make ahead? / owner
Main	_____	_____
Side 1	_____	_____
Side 2	_____	_____
Side 3	_____	_____
Bread	_____	_____
Sauce	_____	_____
Dessert	_____	_____
Drinks	_____	_____

Special equipment or dietary substitutions



Shopping and pantry checklist

Use the quantities on the recipe pages as a starting point. Scale for your guest count.

Produce and herbs

- Potatoes, green beans, carrots, onions, celery, garlic
- Oranges / lemons, fresh rosemary, thyme, parsley
- Fresh or frozen cranberries; optional apples

Refrigerated and frozen

- Turkey (allow safe thawing time)
- Butter, milk or cream, eggs
- Frozen vegetables if substituting

Pantry and baking

- Broth or stock, flour, sugar, brown sugar
- Bread cubes or stuffing bread, salt, black pepper
- Olive oil, cinnamon, pie spice, vanilla
- Pie crust or ingredients for homemade crust
- Pumpkin purée, evaporated milk, canned goods as needed

Hosting and supplies

- Thermometer, roasting pan, carving board, mitts, trivets
- Serving platters, spoons, foil, parchment, labels
- Shallow leftover containers, dish soap, towels, trash bags
- Drinks, ice, napkins, guest hand towels

Extra purchases



Thanksgiving day: morning to night

Example assumes a 4:00 p.m. dinner. Adjust the time blocks and verify the turkey's roasting time independently.

Time	What happens	Owner / notes
7:00 AM	Water, breakfast, review turkey and dinner plan	_____
7:30 AM	Clear counters; set chopping and baking stations	_____
8:00 AM	Start turkey and long-cooking dishes as calculated	_____
10:00 AM	Prepare sides; wash dishes between tasks	_____
12:00 PM	Eat lunch, hydrate, 15-minute reset	_____
1:00 PM	Check roast progress; prepare gravy and vegetables	_____
2:00 PM	Finish table, guest area, drinks, and seating	_____
3:00 PM	Final-hour checklist; warm sides and bread	_____
4:00 PM	Serve dinner, share gratitude, enjoy the meal	_____
After dinner	Dessert, pack leftovers, light cleanup	_____
Bedtime	Turn off appliances, jot tomorrow's priorities	_____

If dinner time changes

Move the serving block first, then recalculate roasting, resting, reheating, and final prep. Preserve a 15–20 minute cushion for delays.

My revised schedule



Turkey thawing & roasting planner

The clock is a guide; the thermometer determines doneness.

Turkey weight: _____ lb Fresh / frozen: _____

Refrigerator thaw start: _____ Cooking day: _____

For refrigerator thawing, allow roughly 24 hours per 4–5 lb at 40°F (4°C) or below. Never thaw at room temperature. For cold-water thawing, keep the turkey sealed, submerged in cold water, change water every 30 minutes, allow about 30 minutes per pound, and cook immediately afterward.

Roasting schedule

Milestone	Planned time	Actual time
Preheat oven	_____	_____
Turkey into oven	_____	_____
First temperature check	_____	_____
Turkey reaches 165°F	_____	_____
Rest / carve	_____	_____
Serve	_____	_____

Food safety: Use a food thermometer to confirm 165°F (74°C) in the thickest part of the breast, innermost thigh, and innermost wing. If stuffing is cooked inside the bird, its center must also reach 165°F. Keep raw turkey and juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Wash hands and sanitize surfaces after contact.

Oven and stovetop traffic

Dish	Appliance / temp	Start / finish
Turkey	_____	_____
Casserole	_____	_____
Vegetables	_____	_____
Rolls	_____	_____
Gravy	_____	_____



Recipe 1 · Herb-roasted turkey

An optional complete recipe to accompany the article's turkey-timing guidance.

Simple herb-butter roast turkey

Serves roughly 10–12 | 12–14 lb unstuffed turkey | Active prep 25 min; roasting time varies

Ingredients

- 1 fully thawed 12–14 lb turkey, giblets removed
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary and thyme
- 1 tsp black pepper; 1–2 tsp kosher salt (reduce if pre-brined)
- 1 onion, quartered; 1 lemon, halved
- 1 cup low-sodium broth for the pan

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 325°F. Pat the turkey dry with paper towels; do not wash it.
2. Mix butter, herbs, pepper, and salt. Rub over the turkey and, carefully, under breast skin.
3. Place onion and lemon loosely in the cavity; do not pack tightly. Put turkey breast-up on a rack in a roasting pan; add broth to pan.
4. Roast, checking the manufacturer's timing guide for your turkey's size. Tent loosely with foil if browning too quickly.
5. Use a thermometer to confirm 165°F in the thickest breast, innermost thigh, and innermost wing. Rest about 20–30 minutes before carving.

Make ahead / serving: Roasting duration is intentionally not guaranteed; oven, bird, and stuffing affect it. A 12–14 lb unstuffed bird often takes around 3–3¼ hours at 325°F, but temperature is decisive. Refrigerate leftovers promptly.

Carving and serving notes



Recipe 2 · Cranberry orange sauce

A colorful make-ahead dish featured in the countdown illustration.

Bright cranberry-orange sauce

Makes about 2 cups | Prep 5 min | Cook 12–15 min

Ingredients

- 12 oz fresh or frozen cranberries
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar (adjust to taste)
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 tsp finely grated orange zest; pinch of salt

Directions

1. Combine cranberries, sugar, juice, water, and salt in a saucepan.
2. Bring to a gentle boil, then simmer 10–12 minutes until most berries burst and the mixture thickens.
3. Stir in orange zest, cool, and refrigerate in a covered container.
4. Serve chilled or at room temperature, keeping perishable food within safe holding times.

Make ahead / serving: Make up to 3 days ahead; it thickens as it cools. Add a splash of water if too thick.

Recipe 3 · Creamy mashed potatoes

Classic buttery mashed potatoes

Serves 8 | Prep 20 min | Cook 20–25 min

Ingredients

- 4 lb Yukon Gold or russet potatoes, peeled and cut evenly
- 3/4 cup warm milk (plus more as needed)
- 6 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, or to taste; black pepper

Directions

1. Cover potatoes with cold salted water. Bring to a boil and simmer 15–20 minutes until fork-tender.
2. Drain thoroughly, return to warm pot briefly to evaporate moisture.
3. Mash with butter; stir in warm milk gradually until fluffy.
4. Season and serve hot. Do not overmix with a blender, which can make potatoes gluey.

Make ahead / serving: Peel and cut ahead, holding submerged in cold water in the refrigerator for a short period. Reheat prepared potatoes safely until steaming hot.



Recipe 4 · Easy bread stuffing

A flexible side for the article's make-ahead and oven-sharing plan.

Herb & celery bread stuffing

Serves 8 | Prep 20 min | Bake 35–40 min

Ingredients

- 10 cups dried bread cubes
- 6 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 large onion, diced; 3 celery stalks, diced
- 2 tsp dried sage; 1 tsp dried thyme
- 2–2 1/2 cups low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten (optional, for a firmer bake)
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter a 9 × 13-inch baking dish.
2. Sauté onion and celery in butter 8–10 minutes; stir in herbs.
3. Combine bread with vegetables, broth added gradually, and optional eggs. Mixture should be moist, not soupy.
4. Spread in baking dish. Cover and bake 25 minutes, then uncover for 10–15 minutes until golden. If using eggs, cook the center to 165°F.

Make ahead / serving: Bake separately from the turkey for simpler temperature control. If preparing ahead, refrigerate promptly and bake/reheat to 165°F.

Recipe 5 · Green beans with garlic

Lemony garlic green beans

Serves 8 | Prep 10 min | Cook 10 min

Ingredients

- 2 lb trimmed green beans
- 2 tbsp olive oil or butter
- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 1 tbsp lemon juice; salt and pepper

Directions

1. Boil or steam beans 4–6 minutes until crisp-tender, then drain.
2. Warm oil in skillet and cook garlic about 30 seconds without browning.
3. Add beans and toss 2–3 minutes. Finish with lemon juice, salt, and pepper.



Make ahead / serving: Trim beans the day before; refrigerate. Cook near serving time for best color and texture.



Recipe 6 · Classic pumpkin pie

A straightforward dessert to include in your holiday prep schedule.

Easy pumpkin custard pie

Makes one 9-inch pie (8 slices) | Prep 15 min | Bake about 50–60 min

Ingredients

- 1 unbaked 9-inch pie crust
- 1 can (15 oz) plain pumpkin purée
- 1 can (12 fl oz) evaporated milk
- 2 large eggs
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp pumpkin pie spice; 1/2 tsp salt

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Place crust in a pie dish.
2. Whisk pumpkin, milk, eggs, sugar, spice, and salt until smooth.
3. Pour into crust. Bake 15 minutes at 425°F; reduce oven to 350°F and bake another 35–45 minutes until edges are set and center has a slight wobble.
4. Cool on a rack, then refrigerate within 2 hours. Serve chilled with whipped cream if desired.

Make ahead / serving: Bake the day before. Keep pumpkin pie refrigerated, and use within 3–4 days.

Recipe substitutions / family favorites



Prep stations & delegation

Keep traffic away from the hot oven and give helpers jobs with clear finish lines.

Station	Tools / ingredients	Assigned to
Chopping	Board, knife, scrap bowl, containers	_____
Baking	Measuring cups, flour, spices, racks	_____
Roasting	Pan, thermometer, mitts, foil	_____
Drinks	Cups, ice, pitcher, napkins	_____
Serving	Platters, spoons, labels, trivets	_____
Cleanup	Dish soap, towels, bins, containers	_____

Helpful guest jobs

- Set one fork, plate, and napkin at each place
- Fill glasses and refresh the drink station
- Greet arrivals and collect coats
- Keep children engaged away from cooking zones
- Bring rolls, gravy, or water to the table
- Label and pack leftover portions

Our helper assignments



The 2:00 p.m. hosting reset

Make guests comfortable before the kitchen gets busy again.

- Count chairs, plates, glasses, forks, spoons, and napkins
- Set low centerpiece or battery candles without blocking sightlines
- Place trivets, serving spoons, and sauces where needed
- Prepare a separate drinks area with ice and nonalcoholic options
- Clear the entryway and check bathroom supplies
- Keep coats and bags away from kitchen walkways
- Take a 10–15 minute water, food, and breathing break

The final 60 minutes

- Confirm turkey temperature and resting/carving plan
- Reheat sides safely; prepare rolls last
- Finish gravy and garnishes
- Arrange platters, serving utensils, and allergen labels
- Ask helper to greet guests and manage drinks
- Move hot pans safely, clear serving paths
- Sit down and enjoy the meal

What can be simplified if we're behind?



After dinner & leftovers

A safe, gentle cleanup leaves more room for stories and dessert.

- Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours (1 hour above 90°F)
- Divide large quantities into shallow containers to cool quickly
- Label turkey, stuffing, potatoes, gravy, and sauces with dates
- Refrigerate cooked turkey and sides for 3–4 days or freeze for longer storage
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F; bring gravy to a rolling boil
- Wipe surfaces, load dishwasher, soak stubborn pans
- Turn off appliances, candles, and decorative lights
- Set aside only essential tasks for tomorrow

Leftover inventory

Food	Container / quantity	Use by / freezer
Turkey	_____	_____
Stuffing	_____	_____
Potatoes	_____	_____
Vegetables	_____	_____
Dessert	_____	_____

A little gratitude

Our favorite moment: _____

Someone who made today special: _____

One thing we'll do differently next year: _____



Notes for next Thanksgiving

The most useful tradition is remembering what worked.

Guest count and menu notes

What ran late / what we would prepare earlier

Recipes worth keeping

A memory to treasure

Good food. Good company. Grateful hearts.