

Take Control

of Thanksgiving Dinner

by Joe Kissell

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This is a free sample of "Take Control of Thanksgiving Dinner."
Click here to buy the full 104-page ebook for only \$10!

READ ME FIRST

Welcome to *Take Control of Thanksgiving Dinner*, version 1.1.

Preparing a complete Thanksgiving dinner for a crowd can be a daunting task, but this book lays out the entire process, complete with easy recipes and detailed, step-by-step instructions. If you've volunteered (or been volunteered!) to make Thanksgiving dinner this year and you want to ensure that everything goes smoothly, this book will keep you organized, focused, and on track. This book was written by Joe Kissell, edited by Karen G. Anderson, and published by TidBITS Publishing Inc.

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What's a Take Control Book?

Take Control books are meant to get you up and running fast with solving a problem, such as backing up your computer, buying an inexpensive airplane ticket, or—in this case—making a complete Thanksgiving dinner without losing your sanity.

Printing Tips

Although our layout is aimed at making online reading an enjoyable experience, we've made sure that printing remains a reasonable option. Please review these tips before you print:

Want a high-quality, spiral-bound printout? Click **Print** on the **cover**. You should order at least 11 business days in advance to be sure you have the book on time, and you may be able to pay a lower shipping charge if you order even earlier.

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- Find more printing tips at <http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/faq.html#printingo>.

Printing from Acrobat 5? Sorry, but we don't recommend printing from Acrobat 5, because we cannot guarantee that the correct fractions will print. (That is, a fraction will likely print, but it likely will not be the correct amount.)

What's New in Version 1.1

This update includes the following changes since the original, 1.0 release:

- Mentioned newer models of the Thermapen thermometer; see the sidebar [Choosing an Instant-Read Thermometer](#) (page 15).
- Added a note clarifying bread quantities; see [Prepare Stuffing](#) (page 44).
- Significantly revised the recipe for candied sweet potatoes, in response to reader feedback, to provide a thicker and more even glaze; see [Make the Orange Dish](#) (page 58).
- Mentioned some newfangled gadgets that may help with lacing and trussing a turkey on [page 74](#).

INTRODUCTION

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time of family togetherness, good food, and all-around positive vibes—for most of us. For the cook, however, it's often a time of stress and grumpiness! Putting together a feast like this is an unusual feat even for experienced cooks. If you've never done it before, it can be terrifying. Many things can go wrong, but you can avoid or solve virtually every problem if you plan well and have the right tools and information within reach.

I'm a foodie from way back, but I make my living writing about computers. In technical writing, my goal is to break down complex and confusing computer tasks into simple, easy-to-follow steps. In this book, I do the same with Thanksgiving dinner, breaking down complex and confusing cooking tasks into simple, easy-to-follow steps.

Anyone who wants to prepare Thanksgiving dinner from scratch can benefit from these instructions. This may be the first time you've cooked Thanksgiving dinner, or perhaps you've tried cooking one in the past with dubious results. You might be a working parent, a guy who usually leaves major cooking to the women, or simply someone who's better at cooking than planning (and needs help with logistics). Whatever the case, I can help you put together the entire meal from start to finish with minimal stress, so you can enjoy the holiday!

For a great Thanksgiving feast, you want all the basic dishes to be prepared well, taste good, and be ready at the right time. You *can* pull this off if you stick with my recipes and timeline as much as possible. There are a million ways to cook each of these dishes, and what you see here may not be the way your mom or your favorite celebrity chef does it. But after extensive testing of recipes and procedures in this book, I can assure you that if you follow them, you'll get good results.

What's on the menu? It's a classic, traditional American and Canadian Thanksgiving dinner:

- Roasted Turkey
- Stuffing
- Mashed Potatoes
- Gravy
- Cranberry Sauce
- Candied Sweet Potatoes
- Pumpkin Pie

I've included a few other options, such as a vegetarian main dish (see [Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish](#)) and green vegetables (see the

sidebar [What about the Greens?](#)), but in general, I stick to the basics. By the way, this meal is *not* low in fat, carbs, or salt. Sorry, dieters!

Although you'll be preparing almost everything from scratch—using fresh, whole ingredients where feasible—I understand that due to time, money, or space constraints, you may have to compromise here and there. So I've included a series of “Cutting Corners” sidebars with simpler approaches you can use if you get into trouble. On the other hand, if you're feeling more ambitious and want to get fancier, you may be interested in the “Upgrading” sidebars (for a few of the dishes), which tell you how to add extra flavor, texture, and finesse.

This book contains detailed instructions, but for your convenience, a separate “Print Me” file includes compact versions of all the recipes, the schedule, and the shopping list. If you bought this book electronically, you should already have the file; if not, download it from <http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/thanksgiving/print-me.zip>.

Based on the feedback I receive this year, I plan to release a low-cost update for next year's Thanksgiving season featuring extra recipes, new hints, and refined instructions where necessary.

Before I set you loose, I want to tell you what assumptions I made when writing this book. I assume:

- You have at least basic kitchen skills (such as chopping vegetables and melting butter without burning it).
- You have an average-sized kitchen with a reasonably large oven.
- You'll have at least one helper. (See [Appendix D: What If?](#) if not.)
- You'll be cooking for eight to twelve people. (See [Appendix B: Scaling Recipes](#) if not.)
- You'll purchase ingredients and supplies well in advance. (See [Appendix C: Last-Minute Thanksgiving](#) if not.)
- You'll do some cooking and prep work the day before.
- You'll read this *whole* book before you do any cooking, prepping, or even purchasing of ingredients!

Last but not least, I assume that cooking Thanksgiving dinner can and should be fun! With these instructions under your belt, you'll be ready to relax and enjoy cooking and eating on Thanksgiving.

QUICK START

Because the most important thing you can do to ensure a successful Thanksgiving dinner is prepare well, I strongly urge you to read this entire book before you do anything else—and do that at least a week before Thanksgiving. At the very least, read [Plan Ahead!](#), [Obtain Supplies](#), and [Obtain Ingredients](#) (pages 8–29), and be sure to take a good look at [Appendix E: The Schedules](#) (page 96).

Print out your reference materials:

- The separate “Print Me” document (available at <http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/thanksgiving/print-me.zip>) includes your shopping list, schedule, and recipes. Print these out now so they’ll be handy when you need them.

Prepare for the big day:

- Work through the [Plan Ahead!](#) section (page 8). Follow the steps provided to determine how many people you’ll be serving, what dishes you’ll prepare, and whether you want to cut any corners or upgrade certain recipes. Using the “Print Me” document as a guide, you’ll also gather the necessary equipment and ingredients, and review your cooking schedule with your helper.

Do day-before preparation:

- To make your life easier when you’re cooking, first [Prepare the Dining Room & Kitchen](#) (page 36).
- [Prepare the Turkey](#) by setting it to soak in a brine solution for several hours (page 39).
- While the turkey is brining, you can do some of the initial steps to [Prepare Stuffing](#) (page 44) and [Make Gravy](#) (page 48)—making the turkey broth with neck and giblets, and combining it with a simple roux. You can then [Make Cranberry Sauce](#) (page 55), [Make the Orange Dish](#) (page 58), and [Bake Pumpkin Pie](#) (page 62).

Do Thanksgiving Day tasks:

- Your biggest job on Thanksgiving is cooking the turkey. And when it’s done, be sure you know how to carve it. See [Roast and Carve the Turkey](#) (page 69).

- While the turkey is roasting, you'll [Make Mashed Potatoes](#) (page 80) and finish the last steps in [Prepare Stuffing](#) (page 44).
- After the meal, you'll want to [Deal with Leftovers](#) (page 85).

Deal with special situations:

- If your guest list includes vegetarians, check out [Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish](#) (page 87).
- For a crowd smaller than 8 or larger than 12, see [Appendix B: Scaling Recipes](#) (page 90).
- What if you have to make Thanksgiving dinner in a hurry and haven't had time to prepare? See [Appendix C: Last-Minute Thanksgiving](#) (page 91).
- If your guests include vegans or people with food allergies, or if you're unable to find a helper, be sure to consult [Appendix D: What If?](#) (page 94).

PLAN AHEAD!

The most important thing you need to make Thanksgiving Dinner a success—more important than the right kind of potatoes, a great turkey, or an instant-read thermometer—is a good plan. You’re going to be juggling preparation of at least half a dozen dishes that all have to be ready at the same time. To pull this off, you want to start with a clear idea of what has to happen when.

The bulk of your preparation will be divided into three phases: tasks that happen on Thanksgiving Day, tasks that happen the day before, and tasks that happen the week before (or, in some cases, even sooner).

But before you start any of that work—ideally, as much as a month before Thanksgiving—you need to do the planning that I describe in this section, because it will influence the choices you make later on. If you’re reading this much closer to Thanksgiving, don’t panic—just go through these steps as soon as possible, and before proceeding with other tasks such as obtaining supplies and ingredients.

RECRUIT A HELPER

Although it’s possible to cook the entire meal single-handedly, you’ll find it easier and more fun if you have an assistant—and my instructions assume that you have, at times, four hands available. You’ll be coordinating, delegating, and doing most of the tricky stuff, while your assistant will focus on simpler tasks. Don’t wait until Thanksgiving morning to ask for help, though! Start scoping out potential helpers several days (or more) in advance.

If you happen to have a willing family member who’s an experienced cook, you’re all set. None of the tasks you’ll be assigning requires great skill, though: if someone can chop celery or operate a mixer, that’s enough ability to serve as your sous chef.

Children can make great helpers too, of course! Depending on their age, strength, or coordination, you may need to modify my recommendations. Young kids and knives, for example, are not a good combination.

Here are the major tasks you can start way ahead of time to make things go more smoothly:

1. Invite your guests, and start to get a good idea of how many people you'll be serving.

Harmonious holiday: *You know the saying: you can choose your friends but not your relatives! If you wish to change familiar (and perhaps annoying) family dynamics, try inviting a few carefully chosen friends to put family members on their best behavior.*

2. Decide which dishes you'll serve. Read the sections of this book that cover preparations, as well any appendixes that apply to your situation. Decide which dishes you'll make as described—and whether you want to cut corners or upgrade (described in sidebars at the end of each “Prepare” section), if you plan to substitute any of your own recipes, and if you need to halve or double any recipes.
3. If you haven't done so already, print the “Print Me” document. Decide if the recipes from the “Print Me” section have you covered (these recipes are meant to be taped up in your kitchen) or if you'll need to have this book available while you cook.
4. If you'll also need the book available, *and you purchased it in electronic form*, decide if you can safely put a laptop in your kitchen or if you need to print selected pages from this book as well. Print those pages. (Or, you may wish to get a print version of this entire book; to find ordering details, click the Check for Updates button on the [cover](#). You should order *at least* 11 business days in advance to be sure you have the book on time, and your shipping charges can be lower if you order even sooner.)

You may wish to annotate whatever printouts you have with notes so that any info you need while cooking will be readily available.

5. If you'll also be cooking from other cookbooks, or downloaded recipes from the Web, you may wish to put bookmarks in appropriate spots or make photocopies, or printouts, of those recipes.
6. Get ready to acquire any equipment and food that you'll need. To do this, review the shopping list you printed from the “Print Me” document. Keeping in mind which dishes you plan to serve

and any alterations in quantity, read [Obtain Supplies](#) (page 11) and [Obtain Ingredients](#) (page 20) and then modify the shopping list as needed.

If you'll be cooking recipes that are not from this book, or if you need to buy extra food to have around the house (breakfast for Thanksgiving day, snacks to eat while cooking, and so on), add it to the list.

7. Schedule when you'll go shopping, and do it.
8. Order your turkey. See [The Turkey](#) (page 20).
9. If necessary, develop a list of items you'll be borrowing or dishes you'd like other people to bring. Put contacting them on your to do list (and do it!).

In addition, there are a few other tasks you might consider doing ahead of time:

- If you have time and are not confident in your cooking skills, I recommend practicing some of the dishes in advance, such as the mashed potatoes, whipped cream, and stuffing (baked separately, not in a turkey). That way, you'll already have a sense of how to follow the recipes with your kitchen equipment before you get to the big day.
- Test your digital thermometer to be sure it works and that the battery's good. You don't want to find out it's out of commission when the turkey's in the oven.
- Although I've allotted some time just before Thanksgiving for cleaning and tidying, you may need extra time if you're expecting overnight guests, or if your kitchen is in need of a deep cleaning. It's never too early to start on that.

I've already done most of the logistical work for you and provided a sample timeline in [Appendix E: The Schedules](#) (as well as in the "Print Me" file). If you decide to go down any alternate paths—with fewer or more dishes or other modifications—you'll need to adjust the schedule accordingly. You may wish to refer to that timeline as you read the next few sections, in which I walk you through what has to happen when (and why) in more detail.

OBTAIN SUPPLIES

Perhaps it's a corollary of Murphy's Law: you always find yourself missing that essential piece of cooking equipment at the most inconvenient moment. At Thanksgiving, that could mean taking the turkey out of the oven and realizing you don't have a large enough serving platter, or a gravy boat, or enough serving spoons. Although these things may sound insignificant now, they won't be when your guests are hungry and all the stores are closed. Well before Thanksgiving—say, one or two weeks ahead—double-check to make sure you have all the following items. And really *check*: sure, you have a roll of aluminum foil in the cupboard, but if you didn't notice you're down to your last 6 inches, you'll be in trouble.

Far out: *If you live far from good sources for any of these items and need to buy them online, allow yourself even more time—at least three weeks.*

You may already have many of these things, but you might need to locate them on the top shelf of the cupboard or in a dark corner of the basement. Find them now and put them in a handy place. Before heading to the store to buy things you don't have, consider whether you'll use them again—and if so, whether you'll use them more than once a year. It's not worth the expense and clutter to own lots of kitchen gear you rarely need, so consider borrowing the missing items from a friend or relative. Alternatively, many of these items can be found inexpensively at a thrift store, garage sale, or flea market.

Some things that I list may seem strange or even unnecessary. I explain exactly why you need them and how to use them in the instructions for the appropriate dishes, so feel free to flip ahead to find out why I recommend them.

Dining Room

Make sure you have these items, and see [Prepare the Dining Room](#) (page 36) for more details:

- **Tablecloth:** Find, borrow, or buy a tablecloth large enough to cover the table (or tables), keeping in mind that they may be extended with extra leaves; also consider a cheap plastic tablecloth for underneath to protect the table's finish from spills.

OBTAIN INGREDIENTS

I have personally had the experience of attempting to buy ingredients such as turkey, cranberries, and stuffing components on the night before Thanksgiving, only to find the supermarket sold out. Don't let this happen to you! I recommend getting every single ingredient 48 hours or more in advance (and many can be purchased much further ahead). Give yourself a comfortable margin of error. And don't forget: all these items are also listed in the "Print Me" file.

The Turkey

The most important ingredient you'll need to obtain is the turkey, and you should start thinking about this at least two weeks ahead of time. You *might* be able to walk into your local supermarket the day before Thanksgiving and find a bird of just the right size and type, but the odds are strongly against you, even if the store usually stocks a large selection of turkeys.

Because the turkey is the centerpiece of the meal, and because so many variables come into play when selecting a turkey, I'd like to go into a bit of detail as to what you can expect.

Varieties

Turkeys come in a bewildering number of varieties. The kind you choose will have an enormous impact on your cooking method, cooking time, and of course the flavor of the final product.

Fresh vs. frozen

The first major choice to make is whether to buy a fresh turkey or a frozen turkey. Fresh turkeys tend to taste a bit better, but they're also more expensive and sometimes harder to come by. Frozen turkeys must be thawed before you put them into the oven, and depending on the size of the bird, thawing (in the refrigerator) can take as long as a week. Thus, while obtaining a fresh turkey may require more planning, *preparing* a frozen turkey takes longer. All things being equal, I recommend buying a fresh turkey if possible.

FOLLOW YOUR PLAN

The planning that you did back in [Plan Ahead!](#) will serve you well now, because you know how many people you are cooking for, which recipes you are making, what equipment you are borrowing, which dishes guests are bringing, and what you still need to buy. You also have printouts of the graphical schedule for following your plan, so you can refer to those for a handy overview of this section.

Now it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work!

Earlier in the Week

About a week before Thanksgiving, you should start thinking about these items. Some need to be done a certain amount of time before Thanksgiving, and others are just good to do before you start cooking:

- Double-check your lists to be sure you have the necessary supplies and ingredients (see [Obtain Supplies](#) and [Obtain Ingredients](#), pages 12-30).
- Make sure you have enough tableware for all your guests; if not, borrow some extras.
- If you are using a frozen turkey, defrost it in the refrigerator—allow 1 day of defrosting for every 4 pounds (about 2 kg).
- Now that you have your turkey, make sure your brining container is the right size and that your plans for keeping it cool will work (see [Select a Brining Container](#), page 41).
- If your dining room or kitchen need more than about an hour of cleaning and decluttering (see [Prepare the Dining Room](#) and [Prepare the Kitchen](#), ahead), start early!
- Make sure you have any decorations you want to use.
- Determine how you'll make table space: Depending on the number and ages of your guests and the size of your dining area, you may need to add leaves to your dining room table, set up the notorious "kids' table," or otherwise create extra eating space. As you consider how much table space you need, keep in mind that you will have a lot of food, and that a little extra elbow room is always appreciated. At the same time...

PREPARE THE DINING ROOM & KITCHEN

The bulk of work preparing Thanksgiving dinner involves cooking, but that's only part of what has to happen. All those other little details, such as digging out the right tablecloth and extra cutlery, can trip you up at the last minute when you're busy juggling a turkey and a potato masher. Even something as simple as having a disorganized kitchen can get you into trouble. So to avoid all these hassles, I recommend setting aside an hour or two—earlier in the week, if possible, but no later than the day before—to get the dining room ready. You can get started on the kitchen, too, and that way you'll have just some dishwashing and drying to do Thanksgiving morning.

Share the love: *Most if not all of these tasks can be done by your faithful helper! You might consider conscripting an assistant to do this work on the day before while you're brining the turkey and making the cranberry sauce.*

Prepare the Dining Room

You might have a large formal dining room that you always keep scrupulously tidy, a dining room that collects clutter—is there still a table under all those old magazines and newspapers?—or anything in between. You might also need to press a larger room into service if you're expecting quite a few guests. Whatever the case, consider these tips for getting the dining area ready the day before:

- **Declutter:** This includes not only cleaning off the table but also making sure there's plenty of floor space to maneuver; all those chairs and relatives can make even a large room seem cramped.
- **Clean:** Depending on the room and your cleaning standards, this may involve dusting, vacuuming, mopping, or even washing windows. Best to get that all done the day before!
- **Decorate:** This is optional, of course, but a few small, tasteful decorations can make your home look more festive and welcoming to guests. Consider, for example, setting out a cornucopia (table space permitting!), candles in nice candlesticks, a vase of fresh flowers, your kids' holiday artwork, (small) ornamental pumpkins,

PREPARE THE TURKEY

If you watch cooking shows on TV or read cooking magazines, you've probably noticed that one of the big trends in recent years has been *brining* certain kinds of meat before cooking them. A brine is nothing more than a salt solution, so brining is just a fancy name for soaking the meat in saltwater.

Why brine?

Brining accomplishes several important things at once. First, it gets more moisture into the meat. In the case of turkey, and particularly the breast, this is a very good thing, as the moisture not only prevents unappetizing, dried-out meat, but also helps the turkey to cook more evenly. Of course, simply soaking the bird in plain water would make it moister, but the salt component is very important too. A bit of the salt seeps into the meat along with the water, and that salt helps the meat to retain water, keeping it moister during roasting. Salt is also a flavor enhancer, so it amplifies the natural turkey flavor. The result is that a brined turkey is more flavorful and moister than an unbrined turkey—without tasting noticeably salty. A brined turkey is also more forgiving; it's slightly less prone to overcooking.

NOTE There are other ways of getting salt into a piece of meat, including rubs and marinades. (A kosher turkey essentially gets a salt rub, while a pre-basted frozen turkey is injected with a salt solution.) For fresh turkeys, brining produces the best results with the least effort.

Brining is by no means a difficult or complex process, but it is potentially tricky in one respect: temperature. You will be soaking your turkey for somewhere between 4 and 12 hours, and during that entire time, it must be kept cold—above freezing but under 40°F (4°C)—to inhibit the growth of bacteria. Keep that in mind when choosing a container and a storage spot, as I describe just ahead.

Warning! *If you're using a kosher turkey or a pre-basted frozen turkey (such as a frozen Butterball), do not brine it! Your turkey already has plenty of salt, and brining could raise the sodium content to an unhealthy level. Just follow the steps in [Get the Turkey Ready for Brining](#) and then pop it back in your refrigerator.*

PREPARE STUFFING

The great thing about stuffing is that you can vary the recipe dramatically and still end up with a perfectly delicious end result. The basic ingredients of a turkey stuffing are bread, *aromatics* (celery and onion), stock or broth, a few spices, and a bit of butter. Of course, lots of stuffings get fancy with sausage, oysters, chestnuts, fruit, cornbread, or any of a zillion other modifications. We're going to stick with the standard (though I provide other suggestions in the "Upgrading" sidebar, at the end of this section). If you have a family recipe for another type of stuffing, and your guests expect it, feel free to use it instead.

IN OR OUT?

There are two broad schools of thought about stuffing: one says to cook it inside the turkey (in which case it truly is *stuffing*) and the other says to cook it separately (in which case it's sometimes called *dressing*).

If you cook the stuffing inside the turkey, it will absorb a good bit of moisture and fat from the turkey—and along with it, lots of flavor. Stuffing the turkey is a (slightly awkward) extra step, as is removing the cooked stuffing, though using a stuffing bag can simplify both greatly.

But the main argument against stuffing the turkey is that the stuffing takes a long time to heat up, while spending significant time in contact with uncooked meat. That's a recipe for bacterial growth, and of course the last thing you want to do is make your guests sick!

However, you can solve this problem quite easily. First, make sure the stuffing is very hot when you put it into the bird. And, second, before you take the turkey out of the oven, check the stuffing's temperature. If it's 160°F (71°C) or higher, you're completely safe.

Because the taste of genuinely stuffed stuffing is better, we'll be cooking it in the bird. But we'll also make some extra, cooked separately, because you can never have too much stuffing!

Most of the stuffing preparation should be done the day before Thanksgiving. Just before you put the turkey in the oven, you'll perform the last two steps: combining the wet and dry ingredients, and heating the stuffing.

MAKE GRAVY

Next to pie crusts, nothing strikes fear into the hearts of inexperienced cooks more than gravy. Everyone has heard horror stories about gravy that was too lumpy, too thick, or too thin, or tasted burnt. And yet, my feeling about gravy is that it's only a problem because most of the recipes are unnecessarily complicated, and because a few fundamental principles of gravy making are poorly understood.

In a nutshell, turkey gravy has only two (or maybe three) major components:

- **Broth:** Generally, the broth is made by cooking the neck and giblets, adding liquid, and straining. We're going to save some time and effort by supplementing the giblet flavors with a healthy dose of store-bought chicken broth.
- **Roux:** A roux is nothing more than a heated mixture of flour and fat—the fat can be butter, oil, meat drippings, or whatever. This is what thickens the gravy. The roux gets darker, and acquires a stronger flavor, the longer you cook it. But cook it too long or at too high a temperature, and it can burn. We'll make a quick and easy butter roux.

The above two items can be made (and combined) the day before Thanksgiving, and by themselves, they make a completely acceptable gravy. To make an even better gravy, though, after the turkey comes out of the oven, you can upgrade it with a third component:

- **Drippings:** All the little bits that accumulate in the bottom of the roasting pan as the turkey cooks can be drained of fat and used to add flavor and body to the gravy.

The essence of gravy making is to add the hot broth to the roux, set the mixture aside, and then (if you wish) add the drippings later, when they're ready.

Beyond that, you'll find many variations. Some people chop up portions of the giblets and add them to the final gravy. Some people include onions, carrots, or other vegetables when making the broth. Some people add spices of various kinds. We're keeping this simple, so we'll add only salt and pepper.

MAKE CRANBERRY SAUCE

Cranberry sauce of some kind is a mandatory part of Thanksgiving dinner, but the recipes, and the ways they're used, vary dramatically. Some people think of cranberry sauce strictly as the jellied stuff you buy in a can; other people like a cold cranberry relish or molded gelatin recipe; still others like a thin, sweet syrup containing whole cranberries and served hot. Some people use cranberry sauce as a condiment, spreading it on the turkey; others treat it more as a side dish. For some people, only homemade cranberry sauce is worth eating; for others, it's so insignificant in the overall menu that store-bought sauce is more than adequate.

I can't possibly resolve these deep philosophical issues here, and I realize that my own take on cranberry sauce is a result of having done things a certain way since I was a kid. But I'd like to show you one way of making cranberry sauce—a cranberry-orange relish—that's both delicious and extremely easy. In fact, making this relish was my job at Thanksgiving even when I was too young to handle a knife, so it's a fine task for you to assign to a helper of nearly any age.

This relish should be made the day before Thanksgiving. The flavor improves as the ingredients blend in a refrigerator overnight. If you use 16 ounces (450 g) of cranberries, this recipe will serve about eight to 10 people. If you're expecting more guests, consider doubling it.

CUTTING CORNERS

I have three words to say about jellied cranberry sauce in a can: Just Say No. I'm sorry to have to put it so harshly, but that's even less authentic than instant potatoes, and you're missing out on the truly excellent flavor of real, fresh cranberries.

If you don't have the time or resources to make your own cranberry sauce, buy *whole berry* cranberry sauce in a can or ask a guest to make a fresh sauce or relish and bring it along.

MAKE THE ORANGE DISH

The orange dish? Is that really its name? Well, virtually everyone I consulted agreed that Thanksgiving dinner had to have something orange, but opinions differed as to whether that should be a dish made with sweet potatoes, carrots, or squash. My personal favorite among these, and probably the most common at Thanksgiving, is sweet potatoes, so that's what we'll be making.

I've had sweet potatoes prepared many different ways, including mashed, boiled, roasted, and fried. When I think of Thanksgiving, though, I think of *candied* sweet potatoes, which is to say, sweet potatoes covered in caramelized sugar.

However—and this is a big “however”—there's a right way and a wrong way to make candied sweet potatoes. Rule number one: *no marshmallows*. You're not making dessert, and the dish will be sweet enough without them. Plus, several people I talked to told me that it was the marshmallows that turned them off to sweet potatoes as children! This food is too good to be on any kid's “yuck” list.

DON'T YOU MEAN YAMS?

In a word: no. What most Americans and Canadians refer to as “yams” are in fact nothing of the sort. Yams are gigantic tubers that can grow up to 7 feet long and weigh 150 pounds. They're grown in Africa, Asia, and a few other parts of the world—but not North America. They look and taste vaguely like sweet potatoes, but botanically speaking, they're an entirely different genus and species; they're not even a relative of the sweet potato.

Confusingly, though, there are six different varieties of sweet potato, and you may well find that any or all of them are labeled as “yam” at your local supermarket. You may also find one variety labeled as “sweet potato” and another as “yam”; when this happens, it's usually the Jersey sweet potato that's called “sweet potato” and a Garnet or Jewel sweet potato that's called a “yam.”

If you find the labels confusing, your grocer may be able to tell you what variety you're looking at. You may, however, have better luck getting helpful answers at a farmers' market or produce stand.

BAKE PUMPKIN PIE

During this book's development process, when a long list of writers and editors were commenting on the outline, nothing provoked such strong emotions and passionate debate as the pumpkin pie. Pretty much everyone agreed it had to be on the menu, but how to go about getting it on the table was a matter of intense disagreement.

On one end of the spectrum, there were people who said that for the inexperienced cook, baking a pie—and especially making a pie crust from scratch—is far too scary to contemplate, and all the more so with everything else that has to be prepared. On the other end of the spectrum, experienced pie makers shared their “easy-as-pie” pie crust recipes and insisted that it's not scary at all, while emphasizing that a fresh pie is crucial to a proper Thanksgiving dinner. In between were many other opinions.

I've made plenty of pies and the process doesn't seem scary to me, but I admit that I made some pretty lousy (though still edible) pie crusts before I got the knack of doing it. So I'm going to give you two equally valid paths to a good pumpkin pie and let you choose the one you feel most comfortable with: you can either make the crust yourself (it really *is* easy!) or buy a ready-made (but unbaked) crust at the store. Either way, the rest of the instructions remain the same: you'll make the filling, pour it into the crust, and bake. And frankly, other than the telltale disposable pie plate, your guests probably won't know the difference.

Along with the cranberry sauce, this is something you should make the day before Thanksgiving. Your oven (not to mention your hands) will be busy on the big day, and this pie does not need to be served hot. Besides, if you mess it up completely, you'll still have time to run to the bakery for a replacement.

MULTIPLE PIES

If you're expecting more than six or eight guests, a single pie won't be enough. You can easily double or triple this recipe, but instead, you might consider using different recipes for the other pie(s)—make an apple, mincemeat, or blackberry pie, for example. (You're on your own for those recipes.) Or consider making one pumpkin pie and asking a guest to bring a second, different dessert.

ROAST AND CARVE THE TURKEY

There are more “right,” “best,” and “ideal” ways to roast a turkey than you can shake a drumstick at. I’m going to show you one that is easier than most and is highly reliable. But before I do, I want to give you a bit of background on roasting turkeys so you understand the challenges and how best to overcome them.

The first thing to know is that the white meat (the breast) and dark meat (the drumsticks and thighs) cook at different rates. The white meat is done when it reaches about 160°F (71°C); if the temperature rises much beyond that, the meat becomes dry and loses tenderness. But the dark meat must be heated to about 170°F (77°C); at lower temperatures, it tends to be chewy and gristly. So there’s a dilemma: if you wait until the dark meat is done, the breast is too dry; if you stop roasting when the breast is just right, the legs will be underdone.

Many methods have sprung up to address this problem; each roasted turkey recipe has a different set of procedures, some of which involve special apparatus, complicated preparation steps, or changes in your oven’s temperature partway through the roasting. Because I want to show you a technique that’s as easy as possible without being error-prone, I skip procedures such as flipping the turkey (awkward and messy) and basting it (a pain, with dubious advantages). As you know already, I believe brining is essential (see [Prepare the Turkey](#), earlier). To that I’m going to add just one trick—using a foil tent over the breast for part of the cooking time.

A Word about Temperatures

Regardless of which technique(s) you use, you need a reliable way to tell when the meat is at the proper temperature. Never go strictly by the tables in cookbooks and on turkey packages; for many reasons they can be off by a wide margin. I also advise against trusting the pop-up indicators you often find in packaged turkeys, because they measure just one spot (possibly not the one you care about most) and you have no way to know how accurate they are (or even, in many cases, which temperature they’re designed to indicate). The solution, which is almost foolproof, is to use a probe-type meat thermometer you put in the turkey very briefly (just 5 to 20 seconds) to obtain a reading; chefs refer to these as “instant-read” thermometers. (See the sidebar [Choosing an Instant-Read Thermometer](#), earlier.)

MAKE MASHED POTATOES

Mashed potatoes should be a simple dish, but many a cook has produced mashed potatoes that were gritty, gummy, or otherwise yucky. One mistake and you can make something truly unappetizing.

The key to great mashed potatoes is choosing the right kind of potato. The best choice is Yukon Gold, a common variety you can find almost anywhere. Supermarkets sometimes label them as yellow potatoes. (If in doubt, ask your grocer.) Yukon Gold potatoes have a slightly yellowish flesh and a thin skin. In a pinch, you can substitute russet (baking) potatoes, but the result will tend to be more watery.

Mashed potatoes are best when they're hot and very fresh. As a result, this'll be the very last thing you prepare, and the last portion of the preparation will occur after you take the turkey out of the oven. (This is also why you should never ask a guest to bring mashed potatoes!)

As I described in the [Potatoes](#) section of [Obtain Supplies](#), you'll need some sort of implement with which to mash the potatoes. All things being equal, I'd use a potato ricer; a potato masher or an upright electric mixer would also work. If you use an electric mixer, be careful not to overmix the potatoes, lest they become sticky. (Handheld electric mixers are less than ideal, but if you must use one, be sure to do your mixing in a bowl with curved sides, not in the pot.)

The recipe here should serve eight to ten people. If you expect more, add 1 pound of potatoes for every two to three additional people (increasing the amounts of other ingredients proportionally).

DEAL WITH LEFTOVERS

The meal is finished, and your guests are cheerfully chatting about football or their holiday shopping plans. But you have one important task left: taking care of all the leftovers. You may think this is something that is so trivial it doesn't require any explanation—just toss everything in the fridge!—but I want to share with you some storage tips, information about how long food can keep in the refrigerator or freezer, and a few other words of advice. Needless to say, you'll want your helper to share in the joy of putting away leftovers!

Warning! *You should refrigerate or freeze all leftovers within 2 hours after they went on the table (not 2 hours after the meal ends).*

Send Food Home

Before you start panicking about where you're going to put all the leftovers, remember that most of your guests will be happy to take some food home with them. So share the love: pack off every willing soul with a few plastic containers to enjoy over the next few days.

Warning! *If you're planning to send leftovers home with your guests, be sure to refrigerate the food until it's time for them to leave. (Label each container with masking tape and a marker as you pack it so you'll know who gets what.)*

Refrigerate or Freeze

As a general rule, your Thanksgiving food can keep for a few days in the refrigerator and several months in the freezer (I note exceptions just ahead). Store leftovers in airtight plastic containers or in a double layer of foil. The key, especially with meat, is to have as little air in the container as possible; zip-top bags make a good choice, since you can squeeze out most of the air before sealing them completely.

Here's how long you should plan to keep the turkey:

- If you haven't already done so, remove the remaining white meat from the bones. (You can leave the meat on the drumsticks and wings.) Don't put a partially carved turkey carcass in the fridge!
- Turkey can keep in your refrigerator for up to 4 days.

APPENDIX A: A VEGETARIAN MAIN DISH

Most of the dishes in this book are vegetarian (though only the cranberry sauce is vegan). The exceptions are the turkey (naturally), the gravy, and the stuffing—though the stuffing can be made vegetarian by substituting vegetable broth for the chicken broth and cooking it outside the turkey. In other words, if you want to serve vegetarians, the main thing you need to do is replace (or supplement) the turkey with an alternative main dish.

There are lots of delicious, autumn-themed, vegetarian main dishes one could make, but we're looking for something that fits in well with the rest of the meal, that's easy to make, and that will look at least slightly impressive on the table next to, or instead of, a roasted turkey. I've received numerous suggestions, and I'd like to share two options that received particularly strong votes.

Tofurky

Yes, it has a goofy name and has been the butt of many jokes, but this product made from tofu, wheat, beans, and natural flavorings has evolved over the years to have a pretty impressive—if not quite turkey-like—flavor and texture. The entire Tofurky product line is vegan, too, so this should satisfy just about anyone's dietary needs.

Tofurky comes in many forms, such as franks, burgers, and deli slices, but what you want as a main dish on Thanksgiving is the Tofurky Roast, which is large, semi-cylindrical, and even pre-stuffed. All you have to do is thaw (for at least 24 hours) and bake (for about 1½ hours (a baste is suggested, and the package includes a recipe).

A pair of roasts: *If you are baking Tofurky in addition to a turkey, you might run into a small problem: Tofurky's package says to bake it at 350°F (177°C), whereas our turkey bakes at 425°F (218°C). I suggest putting the Tofurky in about an hour after the turkey, and removing it when the temperature of its stuffing gets to 160°F (71°C), which, at the higher temperature, should take about 1¼ hours.*

Oven too small for two roasts? *Follow the steps for microwaving a platter of thawed, sliced Tofurky at <http://www.tofurky.com/recipes.htm>. (Scroll down to view the Microwave section.) This takes only a few minutes and can be done just before serving.*

APPENDIX B: SCALING RECIPES

As I stated in the Introduction, the recipes in this book were designed for small crowds of about eight to twelve people. If you have more or fewer people, you'll need to adjust the recipes accordingly. I can't really offer help for cooks who need to feed 40 people, because that's going to require multiple ovens, truly huge pots and stove burners, and several helpers—it's more than these recipes can handle gracefully. However, within reason, you can make allowances for differing numbers of guests. The strategy varies by dish.

Turkey

To feed more than twelve people, I recommend sticking with a medium-sized turkey and supplementing it with one or more turkey breasts, allowing about 1 pound (500 g) of turkey per adult guest. The overall cooking time will be shorter, and you'll still have just one bird to stuff. If you do choose to use a single, larger turkey, remember to allow significantly more time for roasting.

If you have a smaller crowd of four to eight, buy a smaller turkey, or a whole or half turkey breast, instead of a whole turkey. Cook the stuffing separately, but follow the same instructions to brine and roast.

Gravy, Stuffing, Mashed Potatoes, Candied Sweet Potatoes, and Cranberry Relish

These recipes can be doubled, halved, or otherwise adjusted for more or fewer guests simply by changing the proportions of the ingredients.

With a larger portion of candied sweet potatoes or stuffing, you may need multiple baking dishes, which may have trouble fitting in your oven. So consider baking them in shifts: one at the time shown on the schedule, and another after the turkey comes out of the oven.

If you double the gravy, you'll need a pot that can hold about 5 quarts (5 l) of liquid, and a way to store that liquid in the refrigerator—a pair of plastic pitchers may work, or you may want to keep it in the pot.

Pumpkin Pie

Each pie can feed about eight people. So plan on an extra pie for every eight people (or fraction thereof), and remember that variety is always good—not everyone loves pumpkin pie.

APPENDIX C: LAST-MINUTE THANKSGIVING

The key to the process I describe in this book is preparation: having all your ducks—I mean turkeys—in a row long before Thanksgiving Day. But stuff happens. If Thanksgiving is only 1 or 2 days away and you haven't done any of the preliminary steps, don't panic. All is not lost, but you'll have to take serious action. Here are my recommendations for each dish, including tips for emergencies that may arise during an otherwise smooth cooking experience.

Turkey

You might encounter any of several turkey situations.

- **You have a frozen turkey:** Turkeys should defrost in the refrigerator for 4 days or so, but if you don't have that long, you can accelerate the process by soaking the turkey in a large bucket of cold water (or even a clean sink). Remove the wrapping as soon as you can. Be sure to change the water every half hour so the exterior of the bird doesn't warm up too much. For a medium-sized turkey, this method should take 6 to 8 hours.
- **You have a turkey (fresh or frozen) but no time to brine:** Don't sweat it. You'll give up some flavor and juiciness, but your guests will forgive you. However, instead of tenting the turkey breast with foil when roasting it, put the turkey on the V-rack breast side down for the first hour of roasting, then flip it over (using wadded up paper towels to protect your hands) for the remainder of the roasting time.
- **You don't have a turkey:** Call local supermarkets and butchers to see if they have something in the right size. If not, go for one or more turkey breasts, which you can usually find either fresh or frozen in a supermarket, butcher's shop, or deli. You prepare them the same way as whole turkeys, except that you leave out the stuffing and roast for a shorter period of time (looking for the same final breast temperature as for whole turkeys).
- **There are no fresh or frozen turkeys or turkey breasts to be had:** See if you can find a cooked turkey breast that you can reheat. Alternatively, consider roasting a chicken instead (using the same directions, but with less stuffing inside).

APPENDIX D: WHAT IF?

The instructions in this book should cover most situations you'll encounter when preparing Thanksgiving dinner. But I want to provide a few tips for special cases not dealt with elsewhere.

Feeding Vegans

If your guest list includes people who don't eat any animal products, you have a challenge on your hands. Every dish in this book except the cranberry sauce contains at least some animal products. Even the mashed potatoes contain dairy (milk and butter); the candied sweet potatoes and stuffing also use butter. The pumpkin pie crust and filling both use eggs. And of course the turkey and gravy are right out.

Here's what I recommend:

- Make a Tofurky roast as a vegetarian main dish (see [Appendix A: A Vegetarian Main Dish](#)). It includes its own stuffing! If you want to make the polenta dome instead, leave out the cheese and, if you wish, add some roasted vegetables.
- Make at least a portion of the mashed potatoes without butter or milk (you can substitute plain—not vanilla—soy milk). You can add a bit of canola oil to improve the texture a bit.
- Omit the butter (and don't substitute oil) when making the candied sweet potatoes. Just sprinkle brown sugar over the potatoes and bake, using a bit more than the recipe calls for.
- Consider making an extra vegetable dish or two (say, a salad or green bean casserole—see [What about the Greens?](#), page 62).
- Ask your vegan guests to bring their favorite dessert to share.

Coping with Food Allergies and Preferences

You may have a guest who's allergic to some ingredient you use, or you may have someone on a special diet or who simply dislikes a certain kind of food. The best way to deal with this is advance preparation. So ask your guests at least a week ahead of time if they have any allergies or preferences. (Don't worry if it sounds tacky; they'll appreciate the gesture. And some may prefer that you serve the traditional menu the other guests are expecting, and merely call attention to the presence of any troublesome ingredients.)

APPENDIX E: THE SCHEDULES

Use these schedules as a rough gauge of when you (and your helper) should be doing what. Needless to say, these times are approximate and will vary based on your turkey's size, your cooking experience, and so on.

If you are reading on paper, you may wish to print these same schedules from the “Print Me” file, so that you can write on them and/or tape them up in your kitchen. Also, note that the “Print Me” document has grids for custom schedules, so you can create your own. (If you don't have the “Print Me” file, you can download it from <http://www.takecontrolbooks.com/thanksgiving/print-me.zip>.)

If you are reading on a computer screen, you'll find that tasks on the schedules for the day before Thanksgiving and for Thanksgiving Day are linked to their corresponding text in the ebook—just click a colored box to flip to the page where it is described in more detail. You can quickly and easily flip back to the schedule using a keyboard shortcut, as described in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Switching Quickly between Two Pages		
Viewing Software	Menu Command	Keyboard Shortcut
Adobe Acrobat 6–8	View > Go To > Previous View	Command-Left arrow
Adobe Acrobat 5	Document > Go To > Previous View	Command-Left arrow
Preview	Go > Back	Command-[

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Thank you for purchasing this Take Control book. We welcome your comments at tc-comments@tidbits.com.

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Joe Kissell is Senior Editor of *TidBITS*, a Web site and email newsletter about the Macintosh and the Internet, and the author of numerous print and electronic books about Macintosh software, including *Real World Mac Maintenance and Backups* (Peachpit, 2007), *Take Control of .Mac*, and *Take Control of Running Windows on a Mac*. He contributes frequently to *Macworld* magazine. Joe has worked in the Mac industry for over 10 years. He also helps run an Internet publishing business called alt concepts. (<http://alt.cc/>).



In his increasingly imaginary spare time, Joe likes to travel, cook, and practice t'ai chi. He lives in Paris with his wife, Morgen Jahnke, and their cat, Zora. To contact Joe about this book, send him email at jwk@mac.com and be sure to include the words *Take Control of Thanksgiving Dinner* in the subject of your message.

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Shameless Plugs

Although I write about computers as my day job, I have a great many other interests, which I write about on several Web sites:

Interesting Thing of the Day is my virtual museum of interesting things. Topics include unusual or intriguing discoveries in food, travel, technology, language, philosophy, science, history, and more. Please click on over to <http://itotd.com/> and visit.



SenseList is a compendium of lists. Ranging from whimsical to practical, these lists create order out of the chaos of everyday life. You can find SenseList at <http://senselist.com/>.



In **The Geeky Gourmet**, you can read about culinary science, cooking gadgets, and other topics relating to food and technology. You'll even find the occasional recipe! If you enjoyed this book, you're sure to find it interesting. It's located at <http://geekygourmet.com/>.

Truffles for Breakfast is the ongoing story of how my wife and I are living our version of the dream in Paris. Visit us at <http://trufflesforbreakfast.com/>.

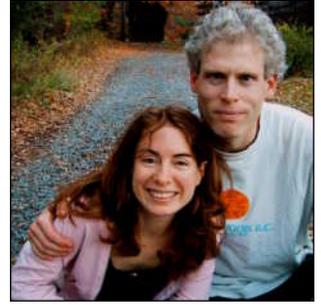
Last but not least is my personal blog, **I Am Joe's Blog**. Learn what it's like to be me at <http://IAmJoesBlog.com/>.

About the Publisher

Publishers Adam and Tonya Engst have been publishing Mac-related content since they first created their online newsletter, *TidBITS*, about Macintosh- and Internet-related topics in 1990. *TidBITS* has been in continuous, weekly production since then. At the TidBITS Web site you can read the latest Macintosh news, check out software reviews, find out what's fun and interesting in the world of the Mac, and much more (<http://www.tidbits.com/>).



Adam and Tonya are known in the Mac world as writers, editors, and speakers. They are also parents to Tristan, who thinks ebooks about clipper ships and castles would be cool.



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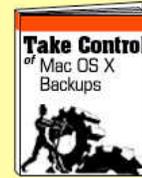


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