

Talking turkey

The traditional stuffed turkey is a part of every dinner table during American's celebration of Thanksgiving today. Though it is not clear if turkey was eaten during the first Thanksgiving, the tradition lives on in America and the feast would be incomplete without it.

The fourth Thursday in the month of November is marked for the yearly celebration of family reunions and feasting.

Turkeys were brought to Britain from America hundreds of years before Victorian times. However, when Queen Victoria first came to the throne, both chicken and turkey were too expensive for most people to enjoy. In northern England, roast beef was the traditional fare for Christmas dinner. Many poor people made do with rabbit. In 1840, beef and a royal roast swan or two were included on the Queen's Christmas Day menu. By the end of the century, most people feasted on turkey for their Christmas dinner. Turkey has slowly crept on to Jamaica's Christmas menu, and there are much more efforts to grow turkeys locally.

Nutrition

There is no question that turkey is nutritious. It is high in protein and low in fat, and provides ready and inexpensive sources of iron, zinc, potassium, phosphorous and B vitamins. A serving of turkey is a two- to three-ounce cooked portion. A serving portion of 3 1/2 ounces, about the size and thickness of a deck of cards (without the skin), can provide about 161 calories, 4 grams of total fat and 30 grams of protein (USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory).

Cooking techniques

Turkey can be cooked in hundreds of ways and creative techniques are constantly being developed to cook the precious bird. Cooking methods should be safe and should produce a moist tender, golden brown bird that tantalises the taste buds. Why persons are turned off from eating turkey is that the meat is always 'dry'. But turkey can be successfully braised, roasted, grilled and cooked by a number of different methods.

Some methods of cooking include traditional roast turkey (unstuffed); traditional roast turkey (stuffed); oven cooking bag; aluminium-foil wrapped, braised in a covered roasting pan; the jerked method; and marinated turkey.

Cooking safely

To cook turkey safely, wash hands, utensils, sink and anything else that has come in contact with the raw turkey with hot, soapy water immediately following preparation.

Roast turkey with fresh thyme rub and honey glaze

Ingredients

1 whole turkey (12lb), thawed

3tbs chopped fresh thyme leaves

1tsp salt

1/2 tsp ground allspice

1/2 tsp finely crushed Scotch bonnet pepper

2tbs vegetable oil

2tbs butter

2tbs logwood honey

Fresh thyme sprigs, pineapple slices and cherries for dressing the turkey

Method

1. Heat oven to 325F. Fasten neck skin to back of turkey with skewer. Fold wings across back of turkey so tips touch.

2. In a small bowl, mix thyme, salt, allspice, pepper and oil. Rub thyme mixture over turkey. Fasten legs by tucking under band of skin at the tail, or tie together with heavy string. Insert ovenproof meat thermometer into turkey so tip is in thickest part of thigh and does not touch bone.

3. On a rack in shallow roasting pan, place turkey, breast side up.
4. Roast uncovered for 1 hour. When turkey begins to turn golden brown, cover with a tent of heavy-duty foil. Roast two hours and 30 minutes longer.
5. In a small saucepan, melt butter and stir in honey.
6. Loosen the legs and allow inside of thighs to cook through. Brush turkey with butter-honey mixture; roast uncovered 20 to 30 minutes longer, brushing with butter-honey mixture again after 10 minutes.
7. Check if it's complete when legs move easily when twisted or when thermometer reads 180F. Place turkey on warm platter; cover with foil to keep warm. Let stand 15 minutes for easy carving.
8. Garnish with thyme sprigs, pineapple slices and cherries.

Serves 12.

Source: www.reddin.com (adapted)