

# Plan to Plate: Everything You Need to Host Thanksgiving Dinner

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Thanksgiving is America's favorite holiday. Family and friends gather to eat the biggest meal of the year. It can be a lot of pressure to entertain guests while attempting to get a perfectly roasted turkey on the table. Having a solid game plan is the key to a holiday that the host can enjoy as much as the guests. Look no further because the hard work has been done for you! You'll learn what supplies and groceries are needed, a cooking timeline, and hosting best practices.

## *Gather Your Gear*

Hosting a successful holiday meal does not require anything fancy. Chances are you have many of the things you need already. But when it comes to hosting a large gathering there are a few things that will help enhance your experience. We will work off a guest list of 10 for the purpose of this example, so adjust accordingly.

### **Cookware**

- Roasting pan: a disposable pan from the grocery store will work just fine. Be sure to put it on top of a baking sheet for extra support in and out of the oven. If you want to invest in a reusable roasting pan, look for one that comes with a rack and is at least a 13"x16".
- Casserole dishes: for 10 people, you will likely need 2-4 9"x13" dishes. Again, disposable pans will work just fine if you don't have enough of your own.
- Crock pot: when cooking a full meal, every burner and all your oven space will likely be used. So, while a crock pot is not required, it is definitely helpful.
- Pots: small and medium sauce pots and a large stock pot.
- Measuring cups and spoons

### **Serve ware**

- Plates, silverware, glasses, and napkins for 10: don't be afraid to go for the festive paper plates and plastic forks and cups. Most grocery stores are well stocked. Just be sure to grab them early (at least a week in advance), because they go quickly!
- Serving spoons: you need one for each side dish you are serving

- Carving knife: an electric knife is very helpful for carving a turkey, especially if you aren't very experienced in knife skills. A regular sharp carving knife will also do the trick!
- Pitcher: one or two for water, tea or a holiday sangria comes in handy.

### ***Other supplies***

- Serving area: the counter, dining table, buffet table. Wherever you choose you will need hot pads, dish towels, or cooling racks to place any warm dishes on.

## ***Food for a Feast***

The following grocery list is all inclusive for a feast for 10. These ingredients will be used to make the following: turkey, sweet potato casserole, apple cranberry casserole, green beans, macaroni and cheese, and rolls.

If you are ordering a fresh turkey, you will need to place your order at least **4 weeks** ahead of time. Most of the remaining groceries should be purchased at least a week before Thanksgiving to ensure that everything is available because nothing is worse than having to body check someone to get the last can of yams. It is best to purchase produce 2-3 days before to ensure optimal freshness. With all these items, the first place to shop is your pantry.

### ***Dry Goods***

- Granulated sugar
- Light brown sugar
- Pecans (whole or bits)
- Whole grain oats
- Chicken bouillon
- Olive oil
- Macaroni noodles (one box)
- Dry mustard
- Cream of cheddar soup (one can)
- Canned Yams (2 large cans)\*
- Salt & Pepper

\*Fresh sweet potatoes can be used but canned yams don't affect the taste in the casserole, and it makes your day much easier.

### ***Dairy***

- Unsalted stick butter (2 blocks)
- Sour cream (16 oz)
- Whole milk
- Dozen Eggs
- Sharp cheddar cheese (1 block)

### ***Meat***

- Turkey (15-18 pounds)\*^

\*Usually, when serving meat, you would calculate  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound per person. But for turkey, estimate 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  pounds per person. For a group of ten, 18 pounds will feed everyone and leave enough for leftovers.

**^If your turkey is frozen (which is totally fine), you will need to account for 24 hours per 5 pounds of turkey. An 18-pound turkey would need to be placed in the fridge on the Saturday before Thanksgiving.**

### ***Frozen***

- Dinner rolls

### ***Produce***

- Honeycrisp apples (4-5 medium size)
- Bag of cranberries
- Green beans

## *Mac & Cheese Recipe*

### Ingredients

- 2 cups uncooked elbow macaroni
- 4 Tablespoons butter
- 2 ½ cups grated sharp cheddar cheese
- ½ cup sour cream
- 10 ½ ounces condensed cheddar cheese soup, (1 can)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup regular milk
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard
- ½ teaspoon black pepper

1. In a large sauce pan, boil macaroni for 6-8 minutes and drain.
2. In another medium saucepan, heat butter and cheese until the cheese melts. Stirring occasionally.
3. Spray your slower cooker with non stick spray. Combine all ingredients. Mix well to combine.
4. Cook on low for 2-3 hours. Stirring occasionally.

## *Take Your Time*

A well thought out cooking schedule is the key to a stress-free day. When every dish has a different cooking time and temperature, it can feel like an impossible task to get it all done. Using this schedule will help you get dinner on the table at 6:30 without ever setting off the smoke alarm. For the most ease, our schedule begins on Saturday.

### **Saturday**

Clean out your refrigerator to make room for your turkey.

Place your frozen turkey in the refrigerator to defrost.

Prepare your space-clean the bathroom, vacuum, etc.

## ***Wednesday***

Prepare and assemble the sweet potato casserole and apple cranberry casserole completely except for the topping. Cover each dish with plastic wrap and place in refrigerator.

Remove the insides of the turkey. Pat down the turkey with paper towels and generously season with salt and pepper. Place back into the refrigerator uncovered. This will create a dry brine and give your turkey a flavorful crispy skin.

## ***Thursday***

9:00am

- Snuggle on the couch with a good cup of coffee
- Watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

12:00pm

- Preheat oven to 325 degrees
- Prep turkey with butter, salt and pepper

12:30pm

- Put turkey in oven lightly covered in tin foil
- If the dinner rolls you chose need time to rise, now is the time to get those out of the freezer and into the pan

1:00pm-4:00pm

- Watch football
- Take a nap
- Set the table

4:00pm

- Prepare mac & cheese

4:30pm

- Remove tin foil from turkey

5:05pm

- Remove turkey from oven and let rest
- Turn oven temperature to 350 degrees

5:15pm

- Put both casseroles into oven
- Prepare green beans- leave to cook on low

5:45pm

- Remove casseroles from oven
- Put rolls in oven
- Carve turkey

6:10pm

- Remove rolls from oven

6:15pm

- Place all dishes on serving table with spoons

6:30pm

- Dig in!

## ***How to Host***

Good food on the table is all you need to host a great holiday dinner. But if you want to create an unforgettable Thanksgiving, you're going to need a few more tools in your pocket.

1. Set the tone: Nothing is worse than arriving at a dinner party in complete silence. There are two obvious choices- turn on an easy playlist or have the football game on the TV. Both of these options will help your guests to feel relaxed and can offer entertainment or conversation topics. Be sure to only choose one option and that the volume level is low enough not to distract from conversation but loud enough to be heard.
2. Prepare the space: Set the thermostat lower than normal. Cooking and people will heat up the house very quickly. Then take time to think through all of the areas your guests will be.
  - a. Kitchen
    - i. Is the trashcan visible?
    - ii. Where are the drinks? Is there ice?
    - iii. Do you have appetizers?
  - b. Bathroom

- i. Do you have plenty of toilet paper with extra rolls within reach?
    - ii. Is there a clean hand towel?
    - iii. Do you have matches or spray available?
  - c. Living room
    - i. Are there enough chairs for everyone?
    - ii. Is there an area outside where your guests can hang out?
    - iii. Do you have blankets for people to use?
3. Welcome your guests: When guests arrive be ready to greet them. Have a drink ready, take their coats, show them where they can relax.
4. Guests should never have to ask for a drink refill, where the bathroom is, or if they can get seconds. Let your guests know at the beginning if they should help themselves and where the bathroom is located. Making these things known at the beginning or keeping a close eye out will help avoid awkward moments.
5. It is not your job to carry the conversation, but a good host will keep the conversation going if it begins to lag. Try asking these questions if that does happen.
  - a. What is something you are most thankful for this year?
  - b. How is your life different today than it was last Thanksgiving?
  - c. Tell us about the best or worst Thanksgiving you ever had. [OB]

## ***Enjoy***

Now you are armed and ready with everything you need to have a special holiday dinner in your home. Even when there are a lot of details to take care of, hosting doesn't have to be intimidating. Just remember, the real gift is not the meal, it's the hospitality. People come to be fed but they linger when they are taken care of and are enjoying themselves. So, after the food is made, sit down, have fun and leave the dishes for someone else. You earned it!