



NEWS RELEASE

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GRILLING A TURKEY

Outdoor cooking of a big bird for the holiday meal is becoming a popular cooking method. During grilling, a turkey cooks by indirect heat in an outdoor covered gas or charcoal grill and a pan of water is placed beneath the grilling surface to catch the fat and juices that drip from the turkey as it cooks. Cooking is done by the smoky, steamy air.

Covered Charcoal Grill

Turkeys that are 16 pounds or less are the recommended size for safe grilling. A larger turkey remains in the "Danger Zone"-- between 40 and 140°F -- too long. **Do not stuff the turkey.** Because cooking is at a low temperature, it can take too long for the temperature of the stuffing to reach 165°F. Also, smoked stuffing has an undesirable flavor.

Begin with clean equipment and a good quality charcoal. Build a pyramid of charcoal to one side, ignite the charcoal, and let the coals get red hot. Place an appliance thermometer on the food rack to monitor the air temperature inside the grill. When the charcoal has developed white powdery ash – about 20 to 30 minutes – and the air temperature reaches 225 to 300°F, place a drip pan in the center of the grill beneath where the turkey will be set and carefully push the hot coals evenly around the edge. Position the grill rack and place the prepared turkey on it (breast side up). Then place the cover on the grill.

Replenish with about 15 briquettes every hour as needed to maintain 225 to 300°F. If desired, add water-soaked hardwood or fruitwood, in the form of chunks or chips, to add flavor to the turkey as it is cooking. **Do not** use a softwood (pine fir, cedar, or spruce) because it gives the food a turpentine flavor and coats it with a black pitch or resin.

Cooking times depend on many factors: the size and shape of the turkey, the distance from the heat, temperature of the coals, and the temperature of the outside air. Estimate 15 to 18 minutes per pound if using a covered grill.

Covered Gas Grill

Gas grills have become very popular in the last few years. The gas heat can be supplied by either propane tanks or by natural gas piped from the home.

If your gas grill has only one large burner, place a pan of water under the grate to create indirect heat. Place the turkey in a roasting pan and place on top of the grill.

If the grill has two or three burners, the turkey should be placed away from the flame. This can be done by turning off one of the burners and placing the turkey in that area. When using a gas grill, always follow manufacturer's directions for cooking times.

Source: Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA (October 1999). "Turkey Alternate Routes to the Table". Online at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/altroute.htm>