

## NEWS ARTICLE

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### **IS IT SAFE TO STUFF THE TURKEY?**

Thanksgiving is here and you may be asking yourself, do I stuff the turkey with dressing or not? Depending upon tradition, you may have strong feelings about whether to stuff your turkey or not.

According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, if you want to maintain optimal food safety and uniform doneness, you should cook the stuffing separately. However, if your tradition is to stuff the bird, you will need to cook the internal temperature of the stuffing to 165°F.

You may tell yourself, “I have never used a thermometer. I just know when it is done.” Keep in mind that bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness, therefore it is essential to use a thermometer.

If you plan to prepare stuffing using raw meat or poultry, you should cook the ingredients before stuffing the turkey to reduce the risk of foodborne illness from bacteria that can be found in raw ingredients. The wet ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated. However, do not mix your wet and dry ingredients until just before spooning the stuffing into the turkey cavity.

When stuffing your turkey, spoon it directly into the cavity after preparation. Whole turkeys come with a packet of giblets inside the cavity. Remove them before stuffing. It is now recommended that you do not rinse poultry before cooking to control the spread of bacteria. Think about this. When you rinse poultry (turkey or chicken) water is splashed everywhere.

Once water has touched raw poultry it has bacteria in it. Not only is it in the sink, but it is also on countertops and anywhere the water may have splashed.

Stuff the cavity of the turkey loosely, about three fourth cups stuffing per pound. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, because heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment. Immediately place the stuffed, raw turkey in a preheated oven set at no lower than 325 degrees.

To assure you are serving a safe and properly cooked turkey, check the internal temperature of the turkey and stuffing with a food thermometer. If the temperature of the turkey and the center of the stuffing has not reached a minimum temperature of 165°F, you will need to return it to the oven and continue cooking. Do not remove the stuffing from the turkey before it reaches 165 degrees because the undercooked stuffing could contaminate the cooked meat.

To prevent a dry turkey, allow the cooked turkey to rest for at least 20 minutes once you remove the cooked turkey from the oven. This will give it time for the juices to seep back into the bird making it juicy.

Food safety continues after the meal. Remember to properly refrigerate the stuffing and turkey within two hours of cooking. Before putting in the refrigerator, remove the stuffing, debone and slice any leftover turkey and place separately in shallow containers. They should be eaten within 3 to 4 days. Do not leave leftovers on the table, counter or stovetop to come back later and “graze on”. You are welcoming bacteria to multiply and it poses a food safety threat. Also, reheat any leftovers to an internal temperature of 165°F. This is true whether you reheat in the oven, on the stove or in the microwave.

Thanksgiving is a time to share with your family and friends. I hope you all have a great day! For more information on food safety, contact me at the Howard County Extension Office

located on the second floor of the courthouse or call 870-845-7517. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

### Recipe of the Week

Save oven space by preparing your dressing in the slow cooker. I have shared this recipe before, but it is worth sharing again. It is by far, the best dressing recipe I have tasted. I always get lots of compliments on it.

### Crockpot Dressing

1 (8-inch) pan cornbread

8 slices day old bread

4 eggs, whisked with a fork

1 medium onion, chopped

1 teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

2 cans cream of chicken soup

¼ cup chopped celery

1 ½ Tablespoons sage

2 cans chicken broth

2 Tablespoons butter or margarine

Break up breads, mix everything together except margarine. Pour into a crock-pot that has been sprayed with non-stick cooking spray or use a liner. Dot top of dressing with butter or margarine.

Cover and cook on high for 45 minutes; then on low 4 to 8 hours until the temperature in the center is 165°F. Yields: 16 servings

