

Plan to Enjoy Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is less than three weeks away. What can you do that will help you relax and enjoy the day?

Plan Ahead

Begin by sketching out the menu. The main course serves as the anchor for the meal. From there, you can identify what side dishes would look and taste good next to the main course. Delegate the side dishes out to those who will be joining you that day. Not only will this help with the time management part of preparing the meal, but will reduce the financial strain placed on your food budget for the holiday. Creating a budget is another helpful part of planning ahead. Consider how much additional food expense your family budget can absorb and remain committed to working within that budget. Watch the sale ads and look for the best prices. Serving the traditional Thanksgiving meal can be accomplished on a tight budget if you take the time to shop around. Using your menu and the sale ads to work from, make a list. Take stock of what you already have on hand and mark anything off the list that you don't need to buy. This will help you avoid overstocking and the impulse purchases that are commonly made when shopping without a list. Before you shop, clean out your refrigerator. Make sure you have room to properly store the perishables when you return from shopping. You want to have ample room in your refrigerator on the day of the meal to handle the leftovers properly.

Prepare Safely

Place the frozen turkey on a cookie sheet in the refrigerator for 24 hours for every five pounds of bird. You can speed the process up by placing the turkey in the sink and cover it completely with cold water. This method will take about 30 minutes per pound. You cannot thaw on the kitchen counter because this provides ideal conditions for bacteria growth. The turkey will thaw from the outside in and that will allow the surface of the turkey to fall within the danger zone - the ideal temperatures for bacteria growth (40 degrees to 140 degrees Fahrenheit.) You cannot be certain that cooking the turkey will destroy all the bacteria and some bacteria can withstand heat. If you are preparing a pre-stuffed turkey, you DO NOT want to use either of the methods mentioned above, but cook it directly from the frozen state. This will prevent the growth of bacteria in the stuffing in the turkey. To ensure the turkey is done, use a meat thermometer to make sure the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Put Away Afterwards

From the time your hot foods are removed from the heat source, you have two hours to serve and then store them safely. Make sure you place the leftovers in shallow containers to make sure they cool below 40 degrees Fahrenheit quickly. Never store leftovers in a crockpot because it takes too long for the food to reach the safe temperature. You can store the leftovers safely in the refrigerator for up to four days or in the freezer for one month. Label the leftovers with the date and contents.

Don't let the holiday and the shopping sneak up on you. Take some time in the next two weeks planning for the special celebration so that everyone, including YOU, can enjoy the day with family and friends. For more information on safe food handling practices or creating a food budget, call the Geary County extension office 785-238-4161.