

Best Way Brined, Air-Chilled Turkey



This recipe has been a family-favorite way of preparing our Thanksgiving turkey ever since we discovered it about 9 years ago. Variations have been added or taken away each year, but the basic formula remains the same. It does take some preparation, but it's simple and results in a moist, flavorful, savory, delicious bird.

A little history of the origins of the recipe

In 2005 the *San Francisco Chronicle* food staff roasted nearly 40 turkeys in their test kitchen and found the brined turkey to be the best. Every year since, they have retested the recipe, and found it to be the best. A few years ago they tweaked the recipe and found it works best when including an *air-chilled method*.

Air chilling may take up a little bit of space in the refrigerator, and an extra day, but the results are well worth the effort.



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(Serves 6-8, with leftovers)

Ingredients:

1 turkey, about 12 pounds

Brine:

1 brown cup sugar
1 ½ to 1 ¾ cups kosher salt
2 ½ gallons cold water
2 bay leaves, torn into pieces
1 bunch of thyme
1 head of garlic, cloves separated and peeled
5 whole allspice berries, crushed
4 juniper berries, smashed (see Note below)

Roasting:

2 tablespoons softened butter + butter for basting
1 ½ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
½ cup chicken stock + more as needed

Instructions:

Remove giblet bag from turkey, along with any extra internal fat and pinfeathers. Rinse well under cold tap water. Combine sugar, salt and 3 to 4 quarts water in a large bowl. Stir until brown sugar and kosher salt dissolve. Add remaining brine ingredients except for the remaining gallons of water.

Double-bag two heavy-duty, unscented trash bags (not made of recycled materials). Then put them in an ice chest that is large enough to hold the turkey and several bags of ice. Place turkey in



bags, pour in brine and remaining 1 ½ to 1 ¾ gallons water - there should be enough liquid to completely cover the bird. Press out air in bags; tightly close each bag separately. Keep turkey cold by piling bags of ice over and around the closed bags, which will also help keep the turkey submerged. Brine for 12-24 hours.

Alternate method:

Place turkey and brine in a large pot. Refrigerate for 12-24 hours. If turkey floats to top, weight it down with a plate and cans to keep it submerged in brine.

Air-Chilling:

(Just a quick note here that the brined turkey is just fine after brining, but this sounds like an interesting twist.)

After brining, rinse the turkey and pat dry with paper towels. Place the turkey in a roasting pan or rimmed baking sheet. Refrigerate, uncovered, 12 to 24 hours. Turn the bird over halfway through drying time.

Roasting:

Preheat oven to 400°. Spread 2 tablespoons softened butter over skin. Sprinkle pepper over skin and in cavity. Tuck wing tips under, loosely truss legs and place turkey on a V-shaped rack in a roasting pan. Tent breast with foil. Put turkey in oven and cook for 30 minutes at 400°. Then turn the heat down to 325° for the remaining time. To ensure that the bird cooks evenly, rotate roasting pan 180° every 30 minutes.

Roast for about 1 hour, remove foil and baste turkey with ½ cup stock. Return to oven and roast, basting with pan drippings every 20 minutes, using more stock as needed.



Start checking internal temperature after about 1 hour by inserting an instant-read thermometer in the inner meatiest part of the thigh, not touching the bone. If legs or breast begin to get too brown, cover loosely with foil. Roast until internal thigh temperature reaches 165°.

Total roasting time should be about 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours. Let bird rest for at least 20-30 minutes before carving.

(**Note:** Juniper berries can be found in the spice section of some supermarkets and specialty grocery stores.)

**Wishing you and your family a very
Happy Thanksgiving!**

George Bato ~ The Wine Riff

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