



Thanksgiving Countdown Cooking Timeline:

One to Three Weeks Before Thanksgiving:

There is plenty of prep work that you can do in the weeks and days leading up to Thanksgiving, so that you can actually enjoy Thanksgiving Day. Grab your calendar and figure out how the activities listed in Days One – Seven will best fit into your schedule. The timeline for the week of Thanksgiving is a bit more hard and fast, but you can squeeze everything into one or two days if you need to.

Day One: Review the recipes and shopping lists. If there are ingredients that you will not be able to buy locally, go ahead and order them online or make plans to drive to a larger city to do your grocery shopping. If you want, you can also divide up the shopping list, and do the shopping over 3 weeks to make it a bit easier on your budget.

Day Two: Buy the turkey – plan on 1 lb. per person (or 1.5 lbs if you want leftovers). Go ahead and calculate when you will need to put the turkey in the refrigerator to thaw and note that on your calendar.

The turkey needs 24 hours of thawing time for every 4 lbs of turkey. So a 20 lb. Turkey would need 5 days to thaw. The turkey needs to be completely thawed by Wednesday morning (the day before Thanksgiving), so once you've calculated how many thawing days you'll need, count back from Wednesday. Our hypothetical 20 lb. Turkey would need to move to the refrigerator on the Friday morning before Thanksgiving.

Day Three – Five: Make the dressing or stuffing cornbread and freeze it. There are several steps to making dressing, so you can divide this over several days if you want. You could do all of this in one weekend day though, if that works better for you.

Day Three: Bake cornbread and bread (for cornbread dressing) or bread (for bread dressing)

Day Four: Dice and saute the onions and celery. Refrigerate

Day Five: Toast the bread crumbs (cornbread stuffing) or bread cubes (bread stuffing) and make the dressing. Freeze the dressing in a dish that can go into the oven.

Day Six: Saute mushrooms for gravy and cream of mushroom soup (used in green bean casserole). Cool and freeze.

Day Seven: Toast pecans. Store these in an air-tight container and then hide them! They are delicious and they will disappear before you know it.

Monday before Thanksgiving:

Put dressing in the refrigerator to thaw.

Tuesday before Thanksgiving:

Making these three recipes today, will greatly simplify your life on Thursday. If this looks like too much, you can move the pie and/or salad dressing back to Monday's to-do list.

Bake the sweet potato pie – wrap well with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

Make the salad dressing – refrigerate in a air-tight container.

Make the gravy – refrigerate in a air-tight container.

The Day before Thanksgiving:

Whatever you do, don't skip out on brining your turkey. This 24 hour soak in salt water will have everyone swearing that this is the best turkey they've ever eaten in their lives.

Brine the turkey. While you're looking at the recipe, go ahead and calculate how long the turkey will need to cook. Read through the entire recipe and make sure you account for all the steps – preheating oven, cleaning turkey, 1st roast, 2nd roast, resting. Subtract that time from the time dinner is supposed to be served so that you know what time to put the turkey on to roast tomorrow.

Make yeast roll dough – leave the dough in the mixing bowl, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate.

Make the cream of mushroom soup and put the green bean casserole together – cover and refrigerate.

Thanksgiving Day:

This looks like a lot, but your main job today will be putting things into the oven and making sure you stick to your timeline. Read through the list below and make notes of exactly what time each dish needs to go into the oven since it will all depend on when you're planning to sit down to eat.

Put the turkey in the oven to roast. Make a note of when you'll need to baste and flip the turkey. Write these times down somewhere and then set a time for the first baste, so that you don't forget.

Shape the yeast rolls, let them rise again, and bake. - Start this 1.5 hours before the meal. Once you take them rolls out of the oven, cover them with a clean, kitchen towel to keep them warm.

Bake the dressing. Start the cornbread dressing 2 hours before the meal. It probably won't take that long to cook, but I want you to have plenty of time because the baking time varies depending on how much stock you added. Start the bread dressing about 45 minutes before the meal. It doesn't take nearly as long to cook. Watch these closely, and when they are done, take them out of the oven and wrap them in kitchen towels to help keep them warm till serving.

Bake the green bean casserole. Put this in the oven 30 minutes before the meal.

Bake the Brown-White Rice casserole. Put this in the oven 1 hour before the meal.

Reheat the gravy. Pour the gravy into a pot or skilled and heat at low, stirring every now and then. Once hot, the gravy can sit on low heat until ready to serve.

Set the pie out to come to room temperature, if you don't want to serve it chilled.

Prepare the greens and apple for the salad. Toss the salad with the dressing right before the meal.