

The Finest Turkey Recipe as found by the San Francisco's California Culinary Academy

CHEZ PANISSE'S BRINE FOR TURKEY INGREDIENTS:

- 2 1/2 gallons cold water
- 2 cups kosher salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 bay leaves, torn into pieces
- 1 bunch fresh thyme, or 4 tablespoons dried
- 1 whole head of garlic, cloves separated and peeled
- 5 whole allspice berries, crushed
- 4 juniper berries, smashed



INSTRUCTIONS: Place the water in a large pot that can easily hold the liquid and the turkey you intend to brine. Add all ingredients and stir for a minute or two until the sugar and salt dissolve. Put your turkey into the brine and refrigerate for 24 hours. If the turkey floats to the top, use a plate or other weight to keep it completely submerged in the brine. Note: The recipe may be halved or doubled; the important thing is to have enough brine to completely cover the turkey. Before roasting, remove the bird from the brine and drain well. Pat dry.

THE BEST WAY TO COOK THE TURKEY

The Best Way to prepare a smaller turkey is to brine it before cooking. Brine it according to the accompanying recipe for 12 to 24 hours, then rinse and dry it well. Spread 2 tablespoons of softened butter over the skin and sprinkle with 1 1/2 teaspoons of ground black pepper over the skin and in the cavity. Tuck the wing tips under, tie the legs together, and place the turkey breast up on a V-shaped roasting rack in a shallow roasting pan. Cover the breast tightly with aluminum foil and place in an oven preheated to 400 degrees. Roast the turkey 50-60 minutes, then remove the foil and immediately baste with 1/2 cup of turkey stock. The stock should help deglaze the roasting pan and provide additional pan drippings. Leave the foil off and baste with pan drippings every 20-30 minutes until the internal thigh temperature reaches 165 degrees; a 12- to 16-pound turkey will cook in about 2³/₄ - 3¹/₂ hours. Start checking the internal temperature after about 1¹/₂ hours of roasting time. If the legs begin to get too brown, cover loosely with foil. Let the turkey rest at least 20 minutes before carving.

ADDED TIPS HELP TO SERVE THE PERFECT BIRD

For those who are not yet on turkey-information overload, here are some additional insights learned during our turkey adventures: -- **Basting.** Use the top portion of the pan drippings to baste. It contains a larger proportion of fat and oil, which helps brown, moisten and flavor the skin. Avoid the solid specks at the bottom of the pan. These can darken more than the skin and even burn. **Brining:** Variations on brine may be made by varying the spices and herbs. If you don't want to brine the bird in your refrigerator, use an ice chest. Place the turkey and brine into a double-layer of garbage bags. Smoosh out all the air pockets, close the bags up and pack in the chest with ice. The bird will happily -- and safely -- brine away. All that extra space freed up in the refrigerator will make the cook happy, too.

GRAVY FROM BRINED PAN DRIPPINGS:

Making gravy from the pan-drippings of brined and roasted turkey takes extra care because the salty brine carries over into the drippings. The heat from oven roasting also reduces the pan drippings, increasing the saltiness even more. To successfully make gravy from a brined bird, strain the pan drippings and defat them by putting the drippings in the freezer after they have cooled. The fat will rise to the top and can be lifted off.

To thicken the gravy, make a roux with equal amounts of unsalted butter and flour. Cook it over medium heat, stir ring occasionally, until the roux begins to look "grainy," about 3-4 minutes. Put turkey stock in a separate pan, and heat. Add a bit of roux to the warm stock while whisking. Allow to come to a simmer to thicken. Add more roux, whisking, until the gravy comes to desired thickness. Taste the defatted pan drippings to determine the saltiness. Then add a tablespoon at a time to the gravy to balance the seasonings. Add herbs, wine or pepper to taste, if desired.