

Easy Thanksgiving cooking tips

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Preparing Thanksgiving meals is about multitasking. One needs to somehow find enough space in the kitchen and enough time to get everything done.

“The secrets to big holiday meals are to prepare a lot in advance and get creative with kitchen appliances, such as your microwave, stovetop and even your outdoor grill,” says Ken Megarr, a Culinary Institute of America trained chef and Director of Panasonic’s Test Kitchens.

Here are some tips from Chef Megarr to make faster Thanksgiving meals:

—Speed up turkey: Many turkeys come frozen hard as rocks. Cut cooking time by pre-heating in the microwave. Bring meat to an internal temperature of just 90 or 100 degrees in the microwave and finish in a pan or on the grill. Prevent uneven cooking, like bloodiness next to bones and charred outsides, by first steaming slightly in the microwave.

—Prepare and chill: Prepare sauces in advance. They can be mixed, cooked and refrigerated up to 48 hours before serving. This saves time and produces bigger flavors. Casseroles with squash, sweet potato or other “root vegetable” dishes can be assembled, refrigerated or frozen and baked later.

—Find hidden space: Oven space and burners are always in high demand. Use the microwave to keep foods simmering, or even the outdoor grill. Light half the grill and place items on the side above where there is no flame and keep the cover down.

—Turn to technology: Different power settings in the microwave enable one to quickly cook delicate dishes, such as poached fruit. And new technology known as “inverter technology,” found in microwaves, allows for a constant energy flow at lower power levels to evenly cook, defrost, or re-heat more precisely than traditional microwaves. This allows someone to perfectly cook delicate foods while preventing overcooked edges and surfaces.

—Talk turkey better and faster: Quickly make herb butter, pipe it under the skin of a turkey

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breast and cook in the microwave for under half an hour for a juicy bird with crispy skin. Combine softened butter, garlic, herbs, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Use a piping bag to inject it under the skin. A plastic bag with a corner cut off will suffice. Transfer the turkey to a lightly floured microwavable roasting bag, poke a few ventilation holes in the top, seal the sides, place in a microwavable dish and cook for around 27 minutes. Be sure internal temperature has reached 165 degrees. Check it five minutes after it's out of the microwave. Allow to rest for 10 minutes before carving.