

Holiday Meats — Not Just Turkey!

No doubt about it, holiday time is turkey time. Of the 71 million fresh whole turkeys eaten in one year, 58 million (or 82 percent) were served at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Yet numerous other meats are also traditional at holiday gatherings. Some families choose a rib roast, others a ham and some will have the butcher arrange a crown roast of lamb.

If a hunter is in the clan, that family may serve wild game such as duck, venison or pheasant. Small families may opt for a bird smaller than a turkey — such as capon, duck, goose or Cornish hen — or a small cut of meat like a pork tenderloin or veal roast. Whatever the choice, have a meat thermometer on hand to determine when the meat has reached a safe temperature as well as the preferred doneness. For special holiday meals, the cook wants everything perfect and perfectly safe. For information on preparing turkey, please request the fact sheet HGIC 3560, *How To Cook Turkey*.

PREPARATION

When choosing your holiday meat, be assured that all beef, lamb, pork, veal and poultry sold at your supermarket have been inspected for wholesomeness by the USDA or state inspection systems. Once your purchase is at home, refrigerate it immediately and cook or freeze fresh poultry within a day or two; fresh meats, three to five days. Observe “use-by dates” on hams sealed at the plant; for store-wrapped cooked ham portions, use within three to five days. Cook-before-eating hams have been heat treated to destroy trichinae but must be fully cooked at home within seven days.

Wild game bagged by hunters obviously has not been federally or state-inspected so care must be taken to handle it safely. Parasites such as *Trichinella* and *Toxoplasma* may be present.

Improper handling can cause bacterial contamination as well as off-flavors. Dress game in the field right after shooting. Dressed meat must be chilled as soon as possible. Keep the game cold, below 40 °F, until it can be cooked or frozen. For more information about wild game, call state or county Extension offices, or request HGIC 3516, *Safe Handling of Wild Game Meats* or HGIC 3603, *Preserving Game Meats*.

ROASTING

Holidays are times when people tend to spend more money for a specialty meat. These fancy meats and poultry may cost more because they are exceptionally tender or high quality. Roasting is the recommended method for cooking tender meats. To roast, meat is placed on a rack in a shallow, uncovered pan and is cooked by the indirect dry heat of an oven. To keep the meat tender and minimize shrinkage due to the evaporation of moisture, a moderately slow oven temperature of 325 °F should be used.

USDA does not recommend cooking meat and poultry at oven temperatures lower than 325 °F because these foods could remain in the “Danger Zone” (temperatures of 40 °F to 140 °F) too long. Bacteria that may be present on these foods multiply rapidly at these temperatures. Boned and rolled meats require more cooking time per pound than bone-in cuts because it takes longer for the heat to penetrate through the solid meat. Refer to the table on page 3 for roasting times of holiday meats.

BACKGROUND ON HOLIDAY MEATS

Beef: Beef is leaner these days so roasting it to medium rare (145 °F) or medium (160 °F) keeps it tender and juicy. Beef roasts are whole muscle meat; therefore any bacteria would most likely be

on the surface. For that reason, a beef roast needn't reach 160 °F in its untouched center to be safe.

Lamb: Technically, "Spring lamb" is meat from lambs slaughtered from March to the first week in October. The term comes from the time when lambs born in harsh winter weather would have little chance to survive until the next year. Today, with more protected animal husbandry conditions, enjoying "lamb" meat from sheep about one year old need not be confined to a particular season of the year.

Some people may view lamb as a fatty meat. However, leg and loin lamb meat has a similar fat content to lean beef and pork loin when trimmed of visible fat. The "fell" is a paper-like covering on lamb and is usually removed from steaks and chops at the retail market. Leave it on leg roasts to help retain shape.

Pork: Because hogs are about 50 percent leaner than they were 25 years ago, today's pork cooks faster and can dry out when overcooked. Years ago when pork had more fat than it does today, the meat could be overcooked and still be fairly tender and flavorful. For safety as well as tenderness and flavor, today's pork should be cooked to 160 °F (medium) or to 170 °F (well-done). Pork cooked to medium doneness as measured with a meat thermometer may still be pale pink inside but will be safe. Heating to 160 °F kills foodborne bacteria, such as *Salmonella*, as well as parasites that cause trichinosis and toxoplasmosis.

Wild Game: To remove the "gamey" flavor, you can soak wild meat or poultry in a solution of either 1 tablespoon salt or 1 cup vinegar per quart of cold water. Use enough solution to cover the game completely and soak it overnight in the refrigerator. Discard the soaking solution before cooking. Wild game is leaner than its domestically raised counterpart. Trim any visible fat, which is where a gamey flavor can reside. Roast tender cuts of venison and game birds (if skinned) covered with oil-soaked cheesecloth or strips of bacon to prevent the meat from drying out. Set them on a rack in a shallow pan and roast at 325 °F.

Duck and Goose: Most domestic ducks are the breed called White Peking. The term "Long Island" duck is a trade name. Domestic ducklings have a great deal of fat. While it helps them float when

swimming, fat is undesirable in a cooked duck. Therefore, it is recommended to prick or score the skin of a whole duck before cooking so much of the fat will render out. Although domestic geese are larger than ducks, they are cooked in the same manner. Oven cooking bags are helpful for cooking these birds because they hold the fat for easy disposal and keep the oven spatter-free.

Capons and Cornish Hens: These specialty birds are chickens. Cornish hens are small broiler-fryers weighing 1 to 2 pounds. Capons are male chickens, which are surgically unsexed; weighing about 4 to 7 pounds, they have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Roast them as you would any chicken.

LEFTOVERS

Basic Tips: Always use clean utensils and storage containers for safe storage. Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator; avoid placing large pots of stew or gravy in the refrigerator to cool since it will likely take until the next day for this amount of food to cool. For foods like ham, lamb and brisket, carve the remaining meat off the bone and store in small shallow containers in the refrigerator and use within three to four days. For frozen storage, wrap meat in heavy foil or freezer wrap or place in a freezer container. For optimum taste, use meat within two to three months. When reheating leftovers, make sure that they have been cooked to 165 °F. If you think you may have kept the food refrigerated for too long, throw it out. Never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it.

SOURCES:

1. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. *Roasting Those 'Other' Holiday Meats*. Holiday 1995.
2. The Meat and Poultry Hotline. *Buying and Cooking Ham and Lamb* Prepared by Susan Brewer, May 1994.
3. USDA Consumer Information Sheet. *A Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling*. September 1997.

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HOLIDAY MEAT ROASTING CHART			
TYPE OF MEAT	OVEN °F	TIMING	INTERNAL TEMP °F
BEEF, FRESH			
Beef, rib roast, bone-in; 4-8 lbs.	325	23-30 Minutes/lb. 27-38 Minutes/lb.	145 Medium-Rare 160 Medium
Beef, rib roast, boneless, 4 lbs.	325	39-43 Minutes/lb.	145
Beef, eye round roast; 2-3 lbs.	325	20-22 Minutes/lb.	145
Beef, tenderloin roast, whole; 4-6 lbs.	425	45-60 Minutes total	145
Beef, tenderloin roast, half; 2-3 lbs.	425	35-45 Minutes total	145
LAMB			
Lamb, leg, bone-in; 5-9 lbs.	325	20-30 Minutes/lb.	160 Medium
Lamb, leg, boneless; 4-7 lbs.		30-35 Minutes/lb.	170 Well-Done
Lamb, crown roast; 5 lbs.	325	30-35 Minutes/lb.	170
PORK, FRESH			
Pork, loin roast, bone-in; 3-5 lbs.	325	20-25 Minutes/lb.	160
Pork, loin roast boneless; 2-4 lbs.	325	23-33 Minutes/lb.	160
Pork, crown roast; 6-10 lbs.	325	20-25 Minutes/lb.	160-170
Pork, tenderloin; ½ - 1 ½ lbs.	425	20-30 Minutes total	160
PORK, CURED			
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; whole, 14-16 lbs.	325	18-20 Minutes/lb.	160
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; half, 7-8 lbs.	325	22-25 Minutes/lb.	160
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; whole, 14-16 lbs.	325	15-18 Minutes/lb.	140
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; half, 7-8 lbs.	325	18-25 Minutes/lb.	140
Ham, fully cooked, boneless; 3-4 lbs.	325	27-33 Minutes/lb.	140
VEAL			
Veal, boneless roast, rump or shoulder; 2-3 lbs.	325	31-35 Minutes/lb. 34-40 Minutes/lb.	160 Medium 170 Well-Done
Veal, bone-in-roast, loin, 3-4 lbs.	325	34-36 Minutes/lb. 38-40 Minutes/lb.	160 Medium 170 Well-Done
GAME			
Venison, round, rump, loin, or rib roast; 3-4 lbs.	325	20-25 Minutes/lb.	160
Duck, wild, whole	350	18-20 Minutes/lb.	180
Goose, wild, whole	325	20-25 Minutes/lb.	180
Pheasant, young, whole; 2 lbs.	350	30 Minutes/lb.	180
Quail, whole	425	20 Minutes total	180
POULTRY: Times are for unstuffed poultry. Add 15-30 minutes for stuffed birds.			
Capon, whole; 4-8 lbs.	375	20-30 Minutes/lb.	180
Cornish hens, whole; 18-24 ounces	350	50-60 Minutes total	180
Duck, domestic, whole	375	20 Minutes/lb.	180