

Best Way Brined Air-Chilled Turkey

Serves 6-8, with leftovers

Several years ago, we roasted nearly 40 turkeys in our test kitchen and found a brined turkey to be the best. In retesting the recipe the last two years, we found it works best when paired with an air-chilled method. Air chilling may take up a little bit of space in the refrigerator, and an extra day, but results in a concentrated flavor and juicy meat.

1 turkey, about 12 pounds

Brine:

1 cup sugar

1½ to 1¾ cups kosher salt

2½ gallons cold water

2 bay leaves, torn into pieces

1 bunch fresh thyme

1 head garlic, cloves separated and peeled

5 whole allspice berries, crushed

4 juniper berries, smashed (see Note)

Roasting:

2 tablespoons softened butter + butter for basting

1½ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper

½ cup chicken stock + more as needed

Instructions: Remove giblet bag and neck from turkey, along with any extra internal fat and pin feathers. Rinse well under cold tap water. Combine sugar, salt and water in a stockpot. Stir until sugar and salt dissolve. Add remaining brine ingredients.

Ice-chest and bag method: Double-bag two heavy-duty, unscented trash bags (not made of recycled materials) or use a purchased heavy-duty brining bag. Put them in an ice chest that is large enough to hold the turkey. Place the turkey in the bag, and pour in the brine to completely cover the bird. You may not need all the brine. Press out the air; if using two bags, close each 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 to 24 hours.

Refrigerator method: Place turkey and enough brine to cover 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.

To air-dry: 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.

Quick air-dry method: Rinse brined turkey and pat dry, inside and out. Vertically place tail side down on a rack set inside a roasting pan. Place turkey in front of a small fan set to medium for about 20-30 minutes; turn the turkey to dry the opposite side. Finally, place turkey on the rack, breast side up (positioned for roasting). Continue to dry with the fan, turning the turkey around once to dry the opposite end. The turkey can be roasted immediately.

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 the oven. 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 to 2¾ hours. Let bird rest at least 20-30 minutes before carving.

Note: Juniper berries are available in the spice section of some supermarkets and specialty grocers.

Nutrition information: The calories and other nutrients absorbed from brines vary and are difficult to estimate. Therefore, this recipe contains no analysis.