

# Chronicle Classic: Best Way Brined 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. Every year since, we've retested the recipe. It's still our favorite.

**Note:** Do not use a self-basting or kosher turkey; these turkeys already contain salt, and will be way oversalted if they're brined. Also, do not stuff a brined bird – the stuffing will also be too salty.

**Brine time:** 12-24 hours | **Active time:** 40 minutes | **Cook time:** 2-2¾ hours

- 1 turkey, about 12 pounds (not a self-basted or kosher turkey)

## The 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 of garlic, cloves separated and peeled
- 5 whole allspice berries, crushed
- 4 juniper berries, smashed (see Note)

## For roasting

- 2 tablespoons softened butter + butter for basting
- 1½ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup chicken stock plus more as needed

**Instructions:** Remove giblet bag from turkey, along with any extra internal fat and pin feathers. Rinse well under cold tap water. Combine sugar, salt and 3-4 quarts of water in a large bowl. Stir until sugar and salt dissolve. Add remaining brine ingredients except for the remaining 1½-1¾ gallons water.

Use a special brining bag (such as Ziploc's 20-gallon Big Bag) or double-bag two heavy-duty, unscented trash bags (not made of recycled materials), then put them in an ice chest that is large enough to hold the turkey. Place turkey in bags, pour in brine and remaining 1½-1¾ gallons water – there should be enough liquid to completely cover the bird. Press out air in bags; tightly close each bag 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 12-24 hours.

**Alternative method:** Place turkey and brine 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.

**Roasting:** Preheat oven to 400°. Remove turkey from brine, rinse and dry well. 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.

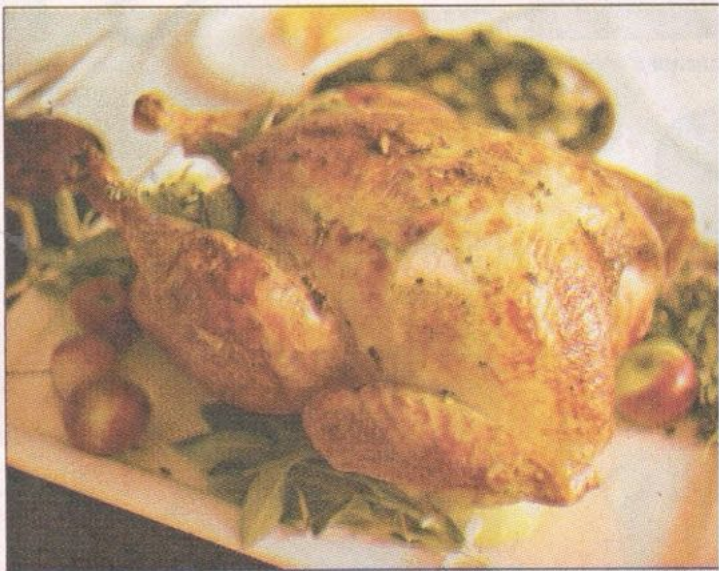
Put turkey in oven.

To assure that the bird cooks evenly, rotate roasting pan 180° every 30 minutes while turkey is

roasting. 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 of roasting time. If legs begin to get too brown, cover loosely with foil. Roast turkey until internal thigh temperature reaches 165°. Total roasting time should be about 2-2¾ hours. Let bird rest for at least 20-30 minutes before carving.

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

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



CRAIG LEE / The Chronicle

## Best Way Unbrined Turkey

Preheat the oven to 400°.

Spread 2 tablespoons of softened butter over the skin and sprinkle 4½ teaspoons of kosher salt and 1½ teaspoons of ground pepper over the skin and in the cavity.

Tuck the wing tips under, truss the legs and place the turkey on a V-shaped rack in a roasting pan.

Tent the breast with foil and place the turkey in the oven.

After about 1 hour, remove the foil and baste the turkey with ½ cup stock.

Baste the turkey with pan drippings and any remaining stock every 20 minutes.

Roast the turkey until the internal thigh temperature reaches 165 degrees, 1¾-2¼ hours.

## Brining and roasting a big bird

Bigger birds can be brined following the same recipe, and for the same amount of time (12 to 24 hours). When it comes to cooking, the recipe will work with a turkey that weighs up to 16 pounds.

Birds over 16 pounds should be roasted at a lower oven temperature, 350 degrees. Cover the breast tightly with foil for the first half of the cooking time, then remove the foil and baste with stock and pan drippings every 30 or 40 minutes for the remainder of the time. A 22-pound bird should be done in about 3½ hours.

## Best Way Gravy for Brined Turkey

**Serves 16; makes about 4 cups gravy**

The amount of pan drippings will vary, depending on the size of the turkey, how much water or stock you use to baste it, and how much liquid evaporates during cooking. However, because the bird has been brined, you won't need to season the gravy as much. Streamline the gravy-making process – make the roux ahead of time, transfer it to a bowl, cool, then cover and refrigerate.

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- Pan drippings to taste
- ½ cup dry unoaked white wine (optional)
- 4 cups low-salt canned chicken broth or homemade turkey broth/stock
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- Kosher salt to taste

**For the roux:** Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add the flour all at once, whisking until incorporated on medium heat. Cook on medium, whisking occasionally, for 3 or 4 minutes, until it begins to look grainy. Transfer to a bowl and set aside.

### For the broth and drippings:

When the turkey is done, pour the pan drippings into a bowl.



CRAIG LEE / *The Chronicle*

Deglaze the roasting pan with the wine by boiling and scraping the pan with a wooden spoon, adding a little water as needed to incorporate the browned bits. Add to the drippings in the bowl.

Skim off the fat with a spoon, or

refrigerate, then remove and discard the fat that congeals on top.

**Putting the gravy together:** Put the roux in a skillet. Bring the broth to a simmer in a covered saucepan, then slowly add 3 cups of broth to the cold or room temperature roux whisking constantly.

Add the reserved drippings slowly, starting with a few tablespoons; taste, then whisk in more, little at a time, until the gravy tastes right to you. Season with pepper and additional salt if needed.

To adjust the consistency, add more broth or simmer for a few minutes. Keep warm until ready to serve.

**Per tablespoon:** 15 calories, 0 protein, 1 g carbohydrate, 1 g fat (1 g saturated), 2 cholesterol, 7 mg sodium, 0 fiber.