

PENNY SAVER NEWS HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

FAX: 932-5261

December 20, 2007

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu

Baste that Bird

Have you ever wondered, as a recent caller did, if there was really any reason to baste a turkey? He thought that since he didn't get wet inside when he showered, there was little reason to think that putting water or broth on the outside of a roasting turkey would put any extra moisture into the meat inside. He'd decided that the only benefit of basting a turkey was to make the house smell wonderful before the meal.

While his first thought is correct, the conclusion is not. Once again, mother did know better. Unless you deep fry or put a foil tent over the turkey, you really should baste it. Besides the wonderful aroma filling the house, there are good reasons to baste.

On a turkey, the dark meat has more fat and tendon, so it stays moister than the white breast meat. That also means it takes longer for the dark meat to be fully and safely cooked. But in the roasting pan the dark meat is usually down, under the breast meat and protected from the heat by the metal of the pan. So it's going to take even longer to cook.

Meanwhile, the drier white breast meat is uppermost in the pan, exposed to the full heat of the oven. By the time the dark meat is fully and safely cooked the white meat will be very overdone and dry. Unless you can slow down the cooking of the white meat!

And that is what basting does. Liquid on the hot skin evaporates and cools the skin. By continuously adding moisture to the skin, the white meat is cooled and cooks more slowly. Basting forces the white meat to cook as slowly as the dark meat does, so that they are both done at about the same time, and neither is overdone.

The basting liquid does not enter the meat, but by evaporating on the outside it

protects the natural juices inside. They are not evaporated away, so the turkey breast does stay much moister inside.

Additionally, by using different liquids for basting you can change the flavor and color of the surface of the meat. A basting liquid that contains sugar, such as a sweet wine or fruit juice, will make the meat brown much faster and darker. Sugars caramelize and brown when they are hot. Sugar has a flavor of its own, caramel has a slightly different flavor. Orange or apple juice will each add their own special tang. Using an herbed broth will enhance the flavor of the herbs on the breast. Adding butter or oil will make the breast skin much crisper.

The alternative to basting a turkey is to tent it with aluminum foil or use a plastic roasting bag. These help to keep the meat moist, but by a different method. The tent or bag captures evaporating moisture and holds steam around the turkey. The bird is basically steamed, rather than roasted. The meat is moist, but does not have the same flavor or color.

The advantage of tenting is that you can put the turkey in the oven and ignore it for 2 to 3 hours or more, until it is almost done. Most cooks who prefer to tent or bag their roasting turkey will remove the foil or bag for the last half hour or more to allow the skin to dry and darken. This comes closer to the flavor of a really roasted bird, but purists will say that they are not at all the same.

Whichever way you prefer to roast the turkey, remember to check the temperature in the thickest part of the thigh, not touching bone, to be sure it is done. A safely cooked turkey or chicken will be 165° F. A beef roast will be at least 145 ° F, and a pork roast will be 160° F. Uncooked ham must reach 160° F, but to reheat a precooked ham it only needs to reach 140° F. Meat that does not get to the right temperature is a safety risk for all who eat it.

Here's a slightly different way to use up some of the leftover turkey and cranberry sauce. Happy Holidays!

Cranberry Mustard Pitas

½ cup whole berry cranberry sauce	3 Tbsp brown mustard
4 ounces (4 cups) packed lettuce or salad greens	½ cup thinly sliced red onion
8 ounces cooked turkey, diced or thinly sliced	4 pita breads
2 oz (1/4 cup) crumbled blue cheese	

Warm pita breads until soft and slice in half to make pockets. Stir cranberry sauce and mustard together. If using diced turkey add to mustard sauce and stir to moisten. Divide greens, onions and cheese crumbles evenly into pita pockets. Add turkey. If using sliced turkey drizzle mustard sauce into each pocket to moisten meat and greens.

Serves 4.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING