

Conscientious Carnivore

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A Pastured Turkey for Thanksgiving

Article and recipe courtesy of Andi Houston Greenbasket.wordpress.com

Turkeys are native to the Americas and have fed the inhabitants here for tens of thousands of years. Well cared for pastured turkeys from a small farm are one of the best examples of food offered by this land we live on.

Unlike factory farmed turkeys, which are kept in close confinement in dark, stifling pens, pastured turkeys actually use their muscles. Because of this, they can be tough or dry if cooked like a grocery store turkey, which is often injected with salt water and MSG to artificially enhance the flavor.

A pastured turkey is an investment and should be cooked with loving care and attention to bring out the full rich flavors of the plants and sunshine that went into it. Taking the time for the following simple steps will insure that your turkey will be moist and succulent.

Sage-Apple Turkey

INGREDIENTS

One pastured turkey, cleaned and plucked
3-4 sticks of salted butter, depending on size of bird
3-4 shallots, chopped
Several handfuls fresh sage and parsley, chopped
Small handful of fresh thyme stems, leaves stripped
½ gallon of apple cider, no sugar or spices added
Plenty of good salt and freshly cracked pepper

EQUIPMENT

Non-reactive basin or bucket large enough to fully submerge turkey
Roasting pan with rack or trivet and a tight-fitting lid
Cotton kitchen string
Meat thermometer

DIRECTIONS

Begin the night before with a fully thawed turkey. Rinse the turkey very well in cold water until the water runs clear.

Find a non-reactive basin that is large enough to hold your turkey fully submerged – make sure it will fit in your refrigerator. Place the turkey in the basin. Place the basin in the refrigerator before taking the next steps which will make the basin too heavy and awkward to move.

Sage-Apple Turkey (continued)

Pour 1 cup of salt over the turkey, then cover turkey with cold water until completely submerged. You may have to place heavy jars or cans on top of the turkey to keep it submerged. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

The next day, drain the turkey very well and pat dry with paper towels. Set the turkey aside to come just to room temperature.

In a food processor or large mortar combine soft butter, shallots, sage, parsley and thyme. Pulse until herbs are completely combined with the butter. Add salt and pepper to taste and set aside at room temperature for the flavors to combine.

Pour the apple cider into a pan and bring to a full rolling boil. Boil until reduced by half its volume. Once reduced, turn the heat to medium-low and continue to simmer until the cider is slightly darkened and syrupy. Set aside to cool.

By the time the syrup is done, the turkey should be close to room temperature. First loosen the skin from the meat of the bird with your hands – be very careful not to tear the skin if possible. Loosen all of the skin around the breasts and down to the legs, then around to the bottom of the bird.

Take a good handful of salt and rub the salt inside body cavity of the turkey to coat it. Take 2/3 of the herb butter and spread carefully between meat and skin along the breast and thighs. Use the kitchen string to wrap around wings and lower legs, tying them tightly against the body - this will help the bird cook evenly.

Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the tied turkey, breast side up, on the rack in the roasting pan. Baste liberally with cider syrup. Close lid and check for a tight fit. (You can insure a tight seal by tearing a narrow strip of aluminum foil and crimping the aluminum foil around the lid, making an air-tight seal that will retain more steam.)

A turkey will take 15-20 minutes per pound of meat to cook. Multiply out your total poundage and then split it into thirds – for example, a 15 pound turkey will take roughly 225 minutes. After the first third of time, turn the oven down to 350. Cook for another third of your total cooking time.

Take the turkey out of the oven and uncover. Wrap two oven mittens in towels to keep from burning your hands. Carefully turn the bird over, breast side down - cooking the turkey upside down lets the juices all run into the breast, keeping the breast moist.

With a spoon and tongs, spread the rest of the herb butter under the turkey's skin. Then baste liberally with cider syrup. Put the lid back on and seal shut again. Put the turkey back in the oven and turn the oven down to 300. Cook for the final third of total time.

Take the turkey out of the oven again and test the temperature with a meat thermometer stuck into the thickest part of the thigh. The temperature should be around 175 degrees. If it's not up to temperature, keep roasting with the lid on for 20 minutes, basting every time you open the lid, until it reaches 175 degrees.

When the turkey has reached the desired temperature and is done, baste with the rest of the apple cider syrup and cover again to let rest for at least 20 minutes so the turkey can reabsorb all of its juices. If you want crispy skin, carefully turn the turkey back breast side up, turn the oven back up to 400 degrees, and roast uncovered 15-20 minutes, until the breast skin is well-browned and crispy.

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