



Thawing your turkey safely

You must keep turkeys at a safe temperature during the thawing process. You should never leave them at room temperature on the counter, in the basement, or any place where the temperature is above 40 degrees F. When a frozen turkey begins to thaw, any bacteria that may have been present on the meat before freezing will begin to grow. If the meat stays in the Danger Zone, 40 degrees to 140 degrees F, for more than 2 hours, bacteria can grow rapidly. The USDA recommends three ways to safely thaw food: in the refrigerator, in the sink using the cold-water method, or in the microwave.

When thawing in the refrigerator, make sure you allow enough time. You will need about 24 hours for each 4 to 5 pounds of turkey in a refrigerator set at 40 degrees F. Also, place the bird in a large pan to collect any juices that may drip and contaminate other food. Use the chart below as a reference.

- For a whole turkey in the refrigerator:
 - 4 to 12 pounds – 1 to 3 days
 - 12 to 16 pounds – 3 to 4 days
 - 16 to 20 pounds – 4 to 5 days
 - 20 to 24 pounds – 5 to 6 days
- You can keep a turkey thawed in the fridge in there for 1 to 2 days before cooking. If necessary, you can freeze the bird again without cooking, but there will be some loss in quality.

The cold-water method is simply thawing the turkey in a sink of cold water that you change every 30 minutes. You should allow about 30 minutes for each pound of turkey. Be sure to use cold water, and make sure you've wrapped the bird securely in a leak-proof bag in order to prevent cross-contamination and a watery bird.

- For a whole turkey in cold water:
 - 4 to 12 pounds – 2 to 6 hours
 - 12 to 16 pounds – 6 to 8 hours
 - 16 to 20 pounds – 8 to 10 hours
 - 20 to 24 pounds – 10 to 12 hours
- You must cook a turkey thawed using the cold-water method immediately.

When thawing in the microwave, follow the manufacturer's directions for defrosting a turkey. They should have recommendations for the cook level and time according to the size of the bird. Cook the turkey immediately after thawing, as some areas of the bird warm up quickly and begin to cook during the microwave thaw. You should not hold the turkey for later cooking after thawing in the microwave as this increases the chance for bacterial growth.

- You must cook a turkey thawed in the microwave immediately.

Reference

USDA Turkey Basics: Safe Thawing

Source: Annhall Norris, Extension Associate for Food Safety and Preservation; University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, Food and Environment

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