

Deep-fried Turkey

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What is golden brown and crispy on the outside and fork-tender and moist on the inside? It's turkey, or other poultry, that has been deep-fried. This popular method of cooking whole birds is quick and fairly easy to do. It does require, however, some advance preparation, special cooking equipment and strict safety measures.

Preparation

Choose a fresh or previously frozen, high-quality turkey of 9 to 12 pounds in weight. A 10-pound bird is ideal. Chickens, game hens, quail or cuts of turkey, such as legs or a whole turkey breast, also can be deep-fried.

Poultry must be thawed before cooking. Remove the giblets from the body cavity before cooking. Remember that, in turkeys, the neck is stored in the body cavity and the giblets can be found in the neck cavity under the flap of skin. Trim this skin flap to allow good oil flow through the bird. Trim off the tail and cut off the wing tips to the first joint. If your bird has a pop-up timer, remove it before cooking. The timer is usually found in the breast.

Use any seasonings that you prefer. A heavy spice rub of Creole seasonings, black pepper or

lemon pepper can be applied both inside and outside the bird. Prepared marinades, available from the grocer, also can be injected into the muscles before cooking. They add juiciness and flavor. Use a marinade injector syringe, also available from the grocer, to inject marinade. A 10-pound turkey should be injected with about 16 ounces or 2 cups of marinade. Use more marinade on larger birds, less marinade on smaller birds or cuts of poultry.

On whole birds, inject about 60 percent of the marinade into the breast muscles, 30 percent into the muscles of the legs and thighs and 10 percent into the wings. Do not inject the marinade under the skin because, as the skin cooks, the water-based marinade contacts the hot oil and causes the oil to pop and splatter.

Equipment

You will need a propane burner (camp burner), a pot large enough to hold the turkey, a lid for the pot and oil. A basket insert for the pot makes it easy to add the bird to the pot and remove it from the hot oil. Set up your equipment outside, away from people and buildings.

Use peanut oil because it burns cleaner and doesn't smoke at high temperatures. A candy/oil

thermometer that measures at least 450 degrees F should be used to measure oil temperature. You also will need clean serving platters and utensils.

Cooking

Measure the volume of oil needed by placing the bird (before preparation with the seasonings) into the cooking pot and adding water until the bird is completely covered. Remove the bird and mark the level on the pot. This indicates the amount of oil needed for cooking. Completely dry the pot, then add cooking oil and place above the flame of the propane burner.

Heat the oil to 375 to 390 degrees F before lowering the bird into the hot oil. Use a candy/oil thermometer to get the temperature just right. The oil should drop to 350 degrees F when the bird is immersed. Cook turkey 3.5 minutes per pound at 350 degrees F. Use a timer to ensure doneness. For example, a 10-pound bird would cook for 35 minutes at 350 degrees F. Keep an eye on your oil temperature. If it rises to 375 degrees F, reduce cooking time to 2.5 to 3.0 minutes per pound. If the temperature drops below 350 degrees, adjust the burner to increase the heat.

Chickens, game hens, quail or cuts of turkey will cook more quickly than a whole turkey. Adjust the cooking time as necessary. Often, these smaller birds will begin to float in the hot oil as they become fully cooked.

When cooking is complete, carefully remove the turkey from the oil and drain on a clean platter. Check for doneness using a meat thermometer inserted into the thickest portion of the thigh. The temperature must reach at least 185 degrees F.

As you carve, make certain that the meat is completely cooked. Check the joints of a wing and thigh to make sure there is no blood. All juices should run clear. Refrigerate leftovers immediately. Do not leave food at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

Safety

Hot oil must be watched at all times. Keep children and pets away from the cooker.

A word of caution for anyone using this method of preparation: while all cooking methods carry some risk of burns because of the high temperatures used during cooking, this technique requires particular attention. When preparing food in a large pot of hot oil, strict supervision by adults is required at all times. Adults should be extra careful to avoid spilling or splashing the oil onto themselves or others. This is particularly important when putting food into or removing it from the oil.

Outdoor cooking requires extra attention to prevent foodborne illness. Wash your hands before preparing food and after handling raw poultry. Use clean cooking utensils and wash them after contact with raw poultry. Thaw frozen meat in the refrigerator at 45 degrees F or less. Use a meat thermometer to tell when poultry is fully cooked and safe to eat.

For more food safety information, refer to Extension publications "Enjoy Poultry Meat Safely," L-5088; "Prepare Meat and Poultry Safely," L-5004; or "Grilling Outdoors Safely," L-5005. They are available on the Web at <http://gallus.tamu.edu/exten/publications.html>.



Prepare the turkey for the deep fryer by (a) trimming the wings to the first joint, (b) removing the wire truss that holds the legs in place and (c) removing the plastic pop-up timer.



Remove the packet of giblets and the neck from the body cavity.



Inject marinade into the muscles of the legs, thighs and breasts.



Marinade injected under the surface of the skin looks like a bruise. As the skin cooks, the water-based marinade contacts the hot oil and causes the oil to pop and splatter. Make sure you inject the marinade into the muscle.



Instead of a marinade, use a spice rub.



A propane burner (camp burner), a pot large enough to hold the turkey, a lid for the pot, a basket insert and oil are needed to deep-fry poultry.



Deep-fried turkey and chicken make a tasty change from traditional baked poultry.

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