Fried Turkey? Tips for a safe feast

K-State food scientist urges consumers to prepare in advance

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — It is almost time for turkey, but preparing for the food-filled season should start early, says Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee.

Top of the list: Blakeslee says a safe feast starts with properly thawing and cooking meats as well as safely using kitchen tools.

Fried turkey has become popular. If considering this cooking method, Blakeslee suggests purchasing a fresh turkey 1-2 days before you plan to fry it, then refrigerating it.

She said it takes at least 24 hours to thaw 4-5 pounds of frozen turkey in the refrigerator before starting the cooking process. Plan an extra 24 hours to be sure it is completely thawed. Leave the turkey in the wrapping and place on a tray to catch any drips from thawing. For frying, it must be completely thawed to prevent hot oil splattering. Blakeslee also recommends testing that the turkey fits in the fryer and adding water to cover the turkey. If the bird is too big, cut it into smaller pieces.

To begin frying, heat oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit and continuously monitor the oil’s temperature with a thermometer. Plan to fry the turkey 3-5 minutes per pound.

Remove the turkey from the oil for about 20 minutes before carving.

“Use a food thermometer to ensure it is cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F,” Blakeslee said.

She said the internal temperature of the turkey should be measured in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook poultry to higher temperatures.

Common food safety issues when preparing a turkey include not washing hands properly; not thawing the frozen turkey in a safe manner (such as on the counter at room temperature); rinsing the turkey with water before cooking (leading to cross-contamination); and letting cooked turkey set for more than two hours at room temperature.
A simpler cooking method commonly used for cooking more than one turkey is roasting them in the oven.

“Cooking two turkeys of about the same weight does not double the roasting time,” Blakeslee said, who urges consumers to ensure there is enough oven space for proper heat circulation, and to measure the internal temperature of the turkey before consuming it.

Blakeslee, who also is coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for food science, publishes a monthly newsletter called You Asked It! that provides numerous tips on being safe and healthy. More information is also available from local extension offices in Kansas.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story

K-State Rapid Response Center Newsletter, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/newsletter/

K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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Story by:
Maddy Rohr
Maddy23@ksu.edu

For more information:
Karen Blakeslee
785-532-1673
kblakesl@k-state.edu