

“Tidal Wave” Turkey And Gravy (The Best Turkey And Gravy In The West!)

Chuckwagon Waxes Eloquent on Brining, cooking, and Gravy-ing a Turkey

Thanksgiving Turkey

It never fails to astound me how many housewives serve up a dry, over-cooked bird for Thanksgiving dinner. If you'd like a bird that your family or guests will never forget, try the brining method below, and then cook the turkey ONLY to 170°F. Watch the temperature and stop cooking when the meat reaches that point. This is the biggest little secret of bird success, but there's two more below also.

Oh, and what about those "pop-up" thermometer gimmicks that come with some birds? Truth is, they have a spring contained inside a plastic tube that is secured by epoxy glue designed to fail at 175°F and above. So, when the plastic thermometer finally pops up, it is already cooked at a too high a temperature. The "carryover" effect will take it beyond 180°F providing you remove the turkey right then! However, most people don't notice it for a while, and by the time they spot the "pop up", the turkey has been overcooked.

The trick is to use your own probe thermometer and monitor it. Stop cooking the turkey when it indicates 170°F. The carryover effect will take it up a couple of more degrees, but it should be just fine. After a short rest period, start carving and serve the danged thing!

Are you going to brine your turkey this year? This is the next best kept little secret. Shucks, just overnight in a salt brine will add so much moisture to the bird you won't believe it. Place 3/4 cup of salt and 3 tablespoons of sugar *per gallon of water* and make enough brine to cover the turkey. This will give you a 21°SAL solution. I just make it in a clean Coleman cooler and add half a bag of cubed ice to the solution. After six hours, I add another 1/4 cup of salt to the water and a little more ice while I agitate the turkey just a little.

Kickin' It Up!

If you really want to kick it up a notch, add an entire litre of 7-Up or Sprite to the brine. This is the third little secret and believe me, your guests will rant and rave about the flavor! Fourteen to sixteen hours in a brine really makes a difference in the turkey. If your wife is doing the cooking, ask her to bake it to only 170°F, being sure not exceed that temperature. Shucks pard, when your local newspaper reporters hear of your success, they may turn you into some kind of culinary genius once the word gets out! Heck, they'll probably erect a monument and sculpture of you in the town square. Perhaps the governor will.... awww... you get the idea! There just isn't any reason for dried out turkey on this great holiday.

Just one more thing wranglers! If your wife insists on cooking this year's Thanksgiving bird herself - without your newfound tips and information - and she insists on cooking that danged old bird past 180°F because it is "traditional"... then... then... allow her to do it – just to keep the peace! However, never, never... and I mean never ever... tell her, mention, or even hint that her turkey was overcooked! You must endure the dry turkey and keep quiet, as mentioning "overcooked bird" will only bring on the wrath, vehement ire, and indignation of your woman! You won't have another hot meal for a month! And you'll get "the treatment" for thirty days... you know, silence and stares! Sheeeyuks, it would be better to be locked in a room with a wounded hypochondriac for thirty days!

Goodness! I almost forgot the gravy!

**“Chuckwagon’s Tidal Wave Turkey Gravy”
(The Best Turkey Gravy In The West!)**

This recipe has so much flavor in it, you may wish to just drink it! Best of all, it may be made ahead and used a little at a time.

- turkey neck & giblets (without the liver)
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 1 tblspn. vegetable oil
- 4 cups turkey broth* (see below)
- 2 cups water
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs of fresh thyme
- 4 tblspns. butter
- 6 tblspns. flour
- salt and pepper

* If you are unable to make your own turkey broth, please use Swanson’s chicken broth as it is made using onions, carrots, and celery. Hey, my reputation is on the line here!

To make the Tidal Wave Broth, heat the oil in a large black skillet, and brown the giblets (without the liver) and the neck until they are nicely seared. Add the onions, cook them until they are softened, and then remove the skillet from the heat for fifteen minutes. Re-heat the skillet, adding the broth and herbs, and scrape the fond from the bottom of the skillet as the mixture begins to boil before turning it down to simmer half an hour. Pour the broth through a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth and discard the solids. Store the flavored broth in the refrigerator two days or freeze it until you are ready to cook Chuckwagon’s Tidal Wave Turkey Sausage and sourdough biscuits.

To make the Tidal Wave Gravy, heat the refrigerated broth in a pan, and then melt the butter in a shallow Dutch oven over medium heat, whisking in the flour to make a roux. Cook the flour and butter roux, whisking it until it becomes the color of dark honey. Add the broth to the roux, a little at a time, as you continue to stir it with a wisk. Simmer the gravy until it thickens, stirring it constantly.

Note: If you wish to use this Tidal Wave Gravy with a freshly cooked turkey, add even more flavor by scraping up the browned bits of fond left in the roasting pan as you reheat the pan on the stove. Deglaze the roasting pan with a bit of white wine or water and then pour the drippings into a fat separator. When it has cooled, stir the fond-flavored defatted drippings into the gravy for even more richness. Simmer the gravy two minutes, finally seasoning it with salt and pepper. Good luck, Let me know how your turkey turn out.

Best wishes,
Chuckwagon