

Smoked Poultry



Poultry Smoking Tips

Before you start smoking, I'd like to share a few "secrets" that will help you create the best smoked poultry ever.

1. Brining works magic on poultry

A brine of salt, sugar, seasonings and water can do wonders to poultry. During the brine, liquid is absorbed into the flesh, adding moisture, flavor, and improving the texture. The absorbed water also conducts heat, so the plumped up bird will cook faster.

2. Don't overcook poultry

Whole poultry can be challenging to cook because different parts of the bird are done at different temperatures. Breast meat is done at 170 Fahrenheit, while the thigh is done at 180 F. Foil placed over the breast partway through smoking will prevent it from overcooking. Remove the bird from the smoker when the thigh reaches 175 degrees and the breast reaches 165. The temperature will raise five degrees as it rests before carving.

3. Add seasoning underneath the skin

To make the best use of seasonings and rubs, put them between the skin and flesh of the bird. This is where they'll make the greatest contribution to flavor.

How To Make Turkey Brine

Turkey brine should ideally be made a day ahead of time. This allows the flavor additions a chance to infuse the brine, and it also insures that the salt and sugar are completely dissolved. For a container, a food grade 5 gallon bucket works fine. You'll need to have plenty of space in your refrigerator, because that's where it will need to be for couple of days.

Better still is an insulated water cooler, the kind you see on road-crew trucks in the summer. The shape and size of these coolers is perfect for brining a whole turkey, and being insulated, the turkey and brine can be kept cold with bags of ice.

A standard turkey brine contains the right kind of salt , sugar and seasonings. Normally, between three quarters of a cup and one full cup of salt is used per gallon of water. Varying amounts and types of sweeteners and flavorings give the turkey that flavor to savor.

Making Brine...Step By Step

- Add one gallon of water to each of two stock pots or large, lidded pans.
- To one of the pots, add the salt and sugar. Bring this to a boil, and boil it for five minutes. Remove it from the heat, cover, and let it cool.
- To the other pot, add the spice, herbs and vegetables. Slowly, bring this pot up to a light boil, simmer for five minutes, remove from heat, cover, and allow to cool.
- When both pots are cooled to room temperature, add them to your five gallon bucket and refrigerate.
- After twelve hours, or overnight, the brine is ready for the turkey.

The brine must be between 35 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit to brine your turkey. Over 40 is dangerous, and under 35 slows the brining reactions.

For a 10-14 pound turkey, two gallons of brine is what you need if you use an upright brining container, like a bucket or a water cooler. If you use a normal box-shaped cooler, you'll need more than two gallons. Whatever you brine your turkey in, it must be completely submerged the entire time.

Turkey Brine Recipes

Turkey brine recipes contain salt, sugar, and flavorings. And good brine recipes strike a balance between these three components, so that no single taste or flavor is overpowering in the smoked turkey.

To make any of the following turkey brines, How To Make Turkey Brine will guide you along the way. To learn how to smoke a turkey from start to finish, my page **Smoked Turkey** will act as your tutor.

Smoked Turkey Brine Recipes

Thanksgiving 2005 Brine

This is the turkey brine recipe I used for my Thanksgiving turkey of 2005. It turned out very tasty and moist. Give it a try and see what you think. The addition of ginger to the turkey brine was an experiment that went well. I enjoyed the cool bite of the ginger along with the other spices.

2 gallons	water
1 3/4 cups	Morton kosher salt
1/2 cup	white sugar
2 Tbs	Morton Tender Quick
2 Tbs	onion powder
2 Tbs	garlic powder
2 Tbs	paprika
1 Tbs	white pepper
1 Tbs	powdered ginger
1 Tsp	mustard powder
1 Tsp	powdered sage
1 Tsp	nutmeg

Sweet Soya Brine

The rich flavor of the soy sauce is sweetened with brown sugar and can be warmed up with the red-heat of cayenne pepper powder. With this recipe, add the soy sauce when combining the two cooled pans of liquid.

2 gallons	water
2 cups	brown sugar
1 1/2 cups	kosher salt
1 1/2 cups	soy sauce
1 Tbs	garlic powder
1 Tbs	black pepper
1 Tbs	cayenne pepper powder (optional)

Apple and Spice Brine

This is a good flavored sweet brine that imparts the flavors of apple, spice and citrus to the turkey. MMMmmmm! Cherry wood for smoke is tops! Simmer pices in the orange and apple juices for 15 minutes. Boil the sugar and salt in the water until dissolved. Cool both, combine, and refrigerate overnight before adding turkey.

1 gallon	water
3 quarts	apple juice
3 quarts	orange juice
1 1/2 cups	kosher salt
1 1/2 cups	brown sugar
10 whole	cloves
1 tsp	nutmeg

Basic Brine

This is the starting point for all brine recipes. Use this as a starting point for creating your own brine recipe. If you add juices or beverages, decrease the recipe amount of water by the amount of added liquids.

2 gallons	water
2 cups	kosher salt
1 cup	white sugar

Hot and Spicy Jalapeno Turkey Brine

If you like it warm...or HOT!, this is the brine for you. The jalapenos give the turkey a nice peppery flavor. Increase or decrease the pepper amounts to satisfy your own craving for heat.

2 gallons	water
2 cups	kosher salt
1 cup	white sugar
1/2 pound	jalapenos, sliced
2 Tbs	<u>red pepper flakes</u>

Use the turkey brine recipes on this page as a guide to your own recipe. Half the fun of smoker cooking is coming up with a unique and excellent recipe that produces bragging-quality smoked food.

Smoked Turkey Breast

Choosing a Turkey Breast

When choosing a turkey breast at the store, you will find breasts that are self basting and others that are minimally processed. If you want more control over the final taste of the bird, choose a minimally processed turkey breast.

Bone-in turkey breasts weigh from three pounds up to seven or more. If you plan to smoke two or more turkey breasts at the same time (which I highly recommend), choose breasts that are very close to the same weight.

Basted turkey breasts have been injected with a flavored brine. If you buy this type, all that needs to be done is to flavor it with your favorite seasoning before it's smoked. Be sure to use a seasoning that's light on the salt, since the pre-brined breast already contains plenty.

Brining the Turkey Breast

A minimally processed turkey breast can be brined with your favorite flavorings. Use your favorite brine recipe, try one of these, or use the following recipe for Cranberry-Apple juice turkey brine.

Cranberry-Apple Smoked Turkey Breast Brine

- 1 gallon cranberry-apple juice cocktail (cold)
- 1/2 cup canning salt
- 1/2 cup granulated white sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon powdered ginger

Combine all ingredients in a food grade plastic bucket and mix well, until the sugar and salt are completely dissolved.

Remove the thawed turkey from the package and trim off any excess skin or flesh. Place the turkey breast in the brine and position a heavy plate over it to keep it submerged. Place the bucket in the refrigerator for 8 to 12 hours.

After brining, pat the turkey breasts dry with a towel and allow to air-dry at room temperature while the meat smoker or grill heats up. A small fan placed to blow over the breasts will help them dry quicker.

Smoking the Turkey Breasts

Pre-heat your meat smoker or grill to 300 degrees Fahrenheit. If using a grill, cook the breasts using the indirect grilling method.

Apple wood smoke has a light flavor and produced a nice color on the finished turkey breasts. Use a couple of two inch chunks in on top of the charcoal, or a couple of small foil packets of chips in a gas or electric smoker or grill.

If using a water smoker, leave the water pan empty. Water in the pan will cause the smoker to cook too cool. The *smoked turkey breast* is done when the internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. Remove and cover with foil, allowing it to rest for 15 minutes before slicing and serving.

Smoked Turkey

Smoking turkey takes more time and effort than most other recipes. The steps involved in smoking a turkey are...

- Choosing the right turkey
- Making brine
- Prepping the turkey
- Brining turkey
- Rinsing and drying the turkey
- The Curing Rest
- Seasoning the turkey
- Smoking the turkey
- Resting the turkey



Turkey Buying Tips

For the best smoked turkey, start with one that's fresh and minimally processed. Freezing causes cells in the flesh to rupture. When thawed, a lot of the juices drain out and are lost.

Most frozen turkeys are processed by being injected with a brine solution, which helps the thawed turkey remain moist when cooked. But you don't want *their* brine in your smoked turkey...you want *YOUR* brine in your turkey!

If availability or finances prevent you from buying a fresh turkey, use a frozen one. Try to get a minimally processed one if possible, but if you can't, that's OK. Just make sure that the turkey is completely thawed before going into the brine.

The Turkey Brine

Mix up a batch of turkey brine using your favorite recipe or a recipe from the Turkey Brine Recipes page.

How to Prepare the Turkey

Prep the turkey next. Remove the giblets and the neck from the body cavity and the neck cavity of the bird. Remove the excess fat from the edges of the skin. Leave as much of the skin on the bird as possible. It protects the meat from drying as it smokes. Rinse the turkey in cold, running water, making sure to clean the body cavity as well as the outside surfaces.

Another important step of preparation is to separate the skin from the breast. Be very careful that you don't tear the skin as you pull it free. Slowly work it loose with your fingers, from the rear to front, and then down the sides toward the legs. Doing this allows the brine to reach the breast meat.

How to Brine Turkey

Now it's time to plop the turkey into the brine. I place it into the brine "head first". If it goes in "feet first", air may become trapped in the body cavity. The brine has to contact every part of the turkey, inside and out. To keep the bird submerged, lay a heavy plate on top of the brine, inside the brining container.

Gently slosh the turkey in the brine every couple of hours while you're awake. You want that brine to do its magic.

Depending on the size of the turkey, brining can take from eight to twenty four hours. A ten pound turkey needs about eight hours in the brine. A fourteen pound bird will need about twelve hours. Anything larger may need

up to twenty four hours.

NOTE: If you prefer a less-salty smoked turkey, brine it for a shorter amount of time. Try brining it half as long. Rinse it well, and let it rest overnight in the fridge. This will give time for the brine concentrated near the surface to move deeper into the turkey.

Another option is to brine it for the full time, rinse it well, then soak it in fresh, cold water overnight (in the fridge) to leech out some of the salt.

It's not a good idea to decrease the amount of salt in the brine recipe. Doing so *will* decrease the saltiness, but the weakened brine won't provide any moisture-retention or flavor-improving benefits.

I recommend smoking a turkey weighing fourteen pounds or less. A larger bird will heat up more slowly, allowing micro-organisms a chance to multiply. I prefer birds that are nearer to eleven pounds, since they take less time to smoke.

Rinse and Dry

After removing the bird from the brine, rinse it in cold, running water. Make sure you clean the body cavity in addition to the outside surface. Position the bird upright, as if it were dancing, in the kitchen sink to drain. You want most of the water to drain from the body cavity. After five to ten minutes, pat the turkey dry with a towel to ready it for seasoning. Be careful if you use paper towels...they can melt onto the turkey flesh, and the resulting mess can be difficult to remove.

The Curing Rest

For the best texture and flavor, let the turkey rest uncovered in the refrigerator twelve to twenty four hours. This gives the salt and brine flavorings time to distribute evenly throughout the turkey. It allows the salt time to modify the proteins, which will improve the texture and moisture retention.

Seasoning The Turkey

The brined turkey can be seasoned with a dry mix of spices and herbs, or with a wet rub. I use a dry mix in the cavity, but I prefer to use a wet rub on the outside surfaces of the turkey. I believe it adheres better, plus the oil in it improves the moistness and color of the smoked turkey. To make a wet rub, mix vegetable or olive oil into the dry ingredients until you have a thin paste.

The trick to seasoning a brined turkey is to get the flavors under the skin. Remember when you separated the skin from the breast before brining? You were preparing it for seasoning at the same time.

Again, carefully lift the skin and coat the meat with some of the wet rub. Try to completely cover the exposed flesh. Pull the skin back into place after you've seasoned the bird. I use a couple of toothpicks to hold the skin in place, since it shrinks as it cooks. You don't want the meat uncovered as it smokes.

Season the outer surface of the turkey with the remaining wet rub. Get into all the nooks and crannies...under the wings and legs. Next, flavor up the inside of the turkey with dry spices. Try this great turkey dry rub recipe I found at the website BBQ-FYI.com. After seasoning, I loosely truss the legs together with a length of butchers' string. Now it's ready for the smoker.

Smoking The Turkey

Get your smoker up to 225 degrees Fahrenheit before you put in the turkey. Oil the grate to prevent sticking. Maintain a temperature of 225 to 250 degrees throughout the smoking session. I like my smoked turkey to be kissed with a combination of oak and apple smoke, about half and half. Use two or three fist sized chunks, spaced throughout the session...you don't want it to be overpowered with smoke flavor. Normally, it will need to smoke from 30 to 40 minutes per pound. Baste the turkey with a little melted butter a few times as it smokes.

When the thick part of the thigh reaches 170 degrees, and the breast about 160, it's time to remove the turkey. The temperature will rise after removing it from the smoker. When the breast reaches 150F, cover it with foil to prevent it from being overcooked.

All that remains is to cover the smoked turkey with a foil tent, and let it rest for at least one-half hour, breast side down, before slicing. This allows the

juices and smoke flavor to evenly disperse throughout the flesh as it firms up.

Serving Suggestions for Smoked Turkey

Smoked turkey is a wonderful smoky treat served hot or cold. I think the flavor actually improves after a couple of days in the refrigerator.

The smoked turkey can be eaten along with a traditional Thanksgiving meal, or any other meal, sidled up next to the mashed potatoes, corn, green beans, stuffing, and homemade bread. It's also great chilled, sliced thin, and served on an assortment of crackers and cheeses. Top these off with green or black olives, a thin slice of tomato, or a bit of avacado. Great for the munchies!