

The Only Way To Cook A Turkey
By Richard Gehman
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It is a rather sobering thought to consider, as a reasonably active writer approaching 40, that one might be remembered not for what comes out of the typewriter but for what comes out of the oven. Mention the byline above to most magazine readers, and you'll get blank stares. Mention it to anyone who has ever eaten a turkey cooked by me, and be prepared to put your fingers in your ears. The cheers, the ecstatic squeals, will be deafening.

There is only one way to cook a turkey, and it is my way. I did not invent this way: Morton Thompson, the writer, did. He gave it to the world in a marvelously funny book called *Joe, The Wounded Tennis Player*, published by Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc. in 1945. Again, the irony-Thompson may be remembered for his novel, *Not As A Stranger*, but he will be remembered longer for Thompson's Turkey.

Over the years—about 15—that I have been cooking Thompson's Turkey, I have added a few variations to his original recipe. My additions add a couple of Pennsylvania Dutch touches to the compendium of Italian, French and Chinese cookery that this turkey is. The only thing I have not been able to do is to figure out a way to make it easier to make.

This turkey is work. It demands more attention than the average six-month old baby. There are no short cuts, as you will see.

Get a huge bird, one weighing no less than 16 pounds and not more than 22. Get a hen, if possible, because she'll have more breast meat. A frozen bird will do, but if possible try to get a fresh-killed one. Have the butcher cut off the turkey's head to leave a tube of neck-skin, and have him peel back the skin and cut off the neck close to the shoulders. This will give you a tube in which you can use left-over stuffing. Save the turkey's fat.

Rub the bird inside and out with salt and pepper. Give it a friendly pat and put it aside.

Chop the heart, gizzard, and liver and put them, with the neck, into a stewpan, adding a clove of garlic, a large bay leaf, 1/2tsp coriander and 1/2tsp salt. Cover with four or five cups of water and set it to simmering on the stove. This is going to be basting fluid later.

Get a huge bowl. Throw in it one diced apple and
one diced orange,
a large can of crushed pineapple,
the grated rind of a lemon, and
3 Tbs. chopped preserved ginger (which you can get either at a
Chinese store or a candy shop).
Add two cans of drained Chinese water chestnuts (nearly all
groceries carry them, these days).

Get another bowl. Throw into it:

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| 4Tbsp fine chopped parsley (get fresh if you can, but dried flakes will do), | |
| 2tsp hot dry mustard, | 2tsp caraway seed, |
| 3tsp celery seed, | 2tsp poppy seed, |
| 2 1/2tsp oregano, | _____ |
| 1tsp black pepper, | 1/2tsp mace, |
| 5 crushed cloves of garlic, | 6 large chopped celery stalks, |
| 4 large chopped onions, | 4 headless and crushed cloves, |
| 1/2tsp turmeric, | 1/2tsp marjoram, |
| 1/2tsp summer savory, | 1Tbs. poultry seasoning, |
| 3/4tsp sage, | 3/4tsp thyme, |
| 1/2tsp basil, | 1/2tsp chili powder, |
| 5 good dashes of Tabasco, | 1 Tbs. salt and |
| 1tsp MSG. | |

Wipe your brow, refocus your eyes and get yet a third bowl. Put in:
3 packages of bread crumbs, and get them at a bakery if you can.
Add 3/4 lb. ground veal,
1/2 lb. ground fresh pork, or sausage meat,
1/4 lb. butter and
all the fat (first rendered) you have been able to pull out of the bird.

Get a fourth bowl, an enormous one. Mix the contents of all bowls in it. Mix it well. Sit down and have a drink until the ache goes out of your arms.

Stuff the turkey and skewer it. Put the left over stuffing into that neck tube I told you to get the butcher to make.

In a mixing cup, make a paste of the yolks of 4 eggs,
1tsp hot dry mustard,
a crushed clove of garlic,
1Tbs. onion juice,
2 pinches of cayenne pepper,
1tsp lemon juice, and
sifted flour to make the paste stiff.

Turn your oven up to 500 F. When it is red hot, put the bird in-breast down in a rack if possible. Close the door. Wipe your brow. Wait until the bird has begun to brown all over. Take it out and paint it all over with the paste. Put it back in, turn the oven down to 325 F, and wait until the paste _____, pull it out again and paint it. Put it back. Keep doing this until you have no paste left.

Add a cup of cider to that stock that's been simmering on the stove. This is your basting fluid. This turkey must be basted every 15 minutes. Don't argue. Set your timer and keep at it.

The bird should cook for at least five and a half hours, and *must* be basted every 15 minutes all the time. Enlist the aid of friends if necessary.

After it has been cooking for about two hours, you will wonder if I am crazy. It will be turning black. In fact, by the time it is finished, it will look as though you've ruined it. Take a fork and poke at the black cindery crust. Beneath it the bird will be a deep mahogany, with a lovely succulent skin. Stick a fork in it and juice will gush to the ceiling.

When you take it out, ready to carve it, you will find that you will not need a knife. A loud sound will cause it to fall apart. The moist flesh will drive you crazy, and the stuffing - well, there is nothing like it on earth. You make the gravy just the way you ordinarily would, and you add it to the giblets that were simmering in the basting fluid.

There is seldom is any left over turkey when Thompson's recipe is used. Even birdy eaters eat more than their share. But if there should be, you'll find that the fowl will retain it's moisture for a couple of days. That's all there is to it. It's work-hard work-but it's worth it.

Now let's all give thanks for Morton Thompson.

NOTES: