

Here's when you should start cooking every dish for Thanksgiving



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Thanksgiving dinner. [shironosov/iStock](#)

The INSIDER Summary:

- Cooking and hosting Thanksgiving dinner can be stressful.
- Between turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, and many more side dishes, it can be overwhelming to determine an efficient cooking schedule.
- INSIDER worked with Dan Holzman, chef and co-owner of The Meatball Shop, to come up with a Thanksgiving timeline that will help you figure out when to start cooking every dish.
- Keep reading for our detailed timeline and prep schedule.

Thanksgiving is one of the most important holidays of the year in the US, at least when it comes to food.

Hosting **Thanksgiving dinner** can be stressful no matter how many guests you're expecting, given that there's a seemingly endless menu of classic **side dishes**, **pies**, and of course, a huge turkey.

INSIDER spoke with **Dan Holzman**, chef and co-owner of **The Meatball Shop** mini chain in New York City, about the best way to plan out your Thanksgiving menu, as well as when you should start cooking each dish.

"If you are the type of person that loves to get stuff out of the way, there are a bunch of dishes and prep work that you can do ahead of time," Holzman said. "But from an efficiency perspective, there's a lot of down time in between roasting a turkey or even making mashed potatoes."

Here's what you should be prepping beforehand:

One week before:

- **Make and refrigerate cranberry sauce.**
- **Prepare turkey or vegetable stock (if you are using homemade).**

The day before:

- **Bake all desserts, including pies.**
- **For stuffing, prepare dried bread one to two days in advance.**

With proper planning, however, it's possible to make a full dinner primarily the day of. It's also possible to avoid *most* of the hassle and stress typically associated with the food-centric holiday.

With that being said, keep reading for our timeline of when you should cook every dish for Thanksgiving dinner.

1. Cranberry sauce



Homemade cranberry sauce. Brent Hofacker/Shutterstock

When you should start cooking: About a week before Thanksgiving.

Cranberry sauce will last up to a week and a half in the refrigerator, so it's the perfect dish to prepare in advance.

Plus, making cranberry sauce requires giving it several hours to cool down to achieve the right texture, as "the thickening process happens when [cranberry sauce] cools," according to Holzman.

2. Pies



Pumpkin pie. [rez-art/iStock](#)

When you should start cooking: The day before Thanksgiving.

Pies may be the last dish that you'll eat on Thanksgiving, but they can be one of the first menu items that you prepare. Baking pies the night before Thanksgiving is an easy way to get ahead and avoid stress on Thanksgiving day.

"The oven space on Thanksgiving is the number one commodity," Holzman said.

Since pies require precious oven space and very specific temperatures, it's best to prepare desserts ahead of time.

3. Turkey



Turkey, the main event. [tuchodi / Flickr](#)

When you should start cooking: Season the turkey the night before, and start cooking it Thanksgiving morning. While it's best to actually cook your [turkey](#) on Thanksgiving day, Holzman recommends seasoning your turkey the night before. Since it's the main event, the turkey should be the first dish you start cooking in the morning.

"The resting process is an absolutely imperative part of the cooking process," Holzman said. Most people overcook their turkeys in the oven and overlook letting them rest, rendering the final product dry and rubbery.

By taking your turkey out of the oven before it is fully cooked, you'll allow the heat to redistribute, allowing heat from the outside to seep in, leaving you with a perfectly cooked, juicy turkey, Holzman explained.

To finish off the process, Holzman suggests carving the turkey, and then broiling it in the oven to complete cooking and crisp the skin.

4. Gravy



Turkey gravy. Darasp Kran/Shutterstock

When you should start cooking: The same time you start cooking your turkey.

Roasting bones and vegetables that you'll be using for [gravy](#) early on Thanksgiving day is a good way to get ahead of the game.

5. Stuffing



Traditional stuffing. [Brent Hofacker/Shutterstock](#)

When you should start cooking: Prepare bread the night before, start cooking midday.

Based on whether you prefer making [stuffing](#) with fresh or dried bread, or even croutons, there are steps you can take days before Thanksgiving to prepare this dish.

"Drying croutons overnight or over the course of two days is easier than drying them in the oven at the last minute," Holzman said.

6. Salad



Apple walnut salad. [Shutterstock](#)

When you should start cooking: While your turkey and stuffing are in the oven.

Chopping and assembling salad is a great way to use downtime while other dishes are in the oven. When dinnertime arrives, all you'll have to do is throw together the ingredients and add dressing.

7. Green bean casserole



Green bean casserole. [Matthew Mead / AP](#)

When you should start cooking: In the afternoon, while other dishes are in the oven.

Various side dishes, such as [green bean casserole](#), are best when served fresh. After salads have been prepped and other dishes are in the oven, you can get started on more of your family's favorite side dishes.

Green bean casserole takes about an hour to make, including prep and cook time, so it's best when made no more than a few hours before dinnertime.

8. Sweet potato casserole



Sweet potato casserole. [Shutterstock/vm2002](#)

When you should start cooking: In the afternoon, while other dishes are in the oven.

[Sweet potato casserole](#) is another dish that takes about an hour to make, so it can be prepared closer to dinnertime.

9. Brussels sprouts



Flickr / jules

When you should start cooking: A couple hours before dinnertime.

Once more complicated and prep-heavy dishes are in the oven, you can start roasting vegetables like green beans or **brussels sprouts**, neither of which should take very long.

10. Mashed potatoes



Mashed potatoes. [bhofack2 / iStock](#)

When you should start cooking: A couple hours before dinnertime.

"Mashed potatoes are best served when they're hot and just made," Holzman said. To keep them hot until dinner is served, put them in a dish on a low flame on the stove or on low heat in the oven.

Dinner is served!



A complete Thanksgiving dinner. [shironosov/iStock](#)

If you follow this schedule, you'll be able to get dinner on the table with a minimal amount of stress.