

## Holiday Meats—Not Just Turkey!

No doubt about it, holiday time is turkey time. Of the 266 million turkeys produced in 2006, 30 percent are served at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Yet numerous other meats are also traditional at holiday gatherings. Some families choose a rib roast, others a ham and some will have the butcher arrange a crown roast of lamb.

If a hunter is in the clan, that family may serve wild game such as duck, venison or pheasant. Small families may opt for a bird smaller than a turkey—such as capon, duck, goose or Cornish hen—or a small cut of meat like a pork tenderloin or veal roast. Whatever the choice, have a meat thermometer on hand to determine when the meat has reached a safe temperature, as well as the preferred doneness. For special holiday meals, the cook wants everything perfect and perfectly safe. For information on preparing turkey, please see [HGIC 3560, \*How To Cook Turkey\*](#).

### Preparation

When choosing your holiday meat, be assured that all beef, lamb, pork, veal and poultry sold at your supermarket have been inspected for wholesomeness by the USDA or state inspection systems. Once your purchase is at home, refrigerate it immediately. Cook or freeze fresh poultry within a day or two; fresh meats, three to five days. Observe “use-by dates” on hams sealed at the plant; for store-wrapped cooked ham portions, use within three to five days.

Wild game bagged by hunters obviously has not been federally or state-inspected so care must be taken to handle it safely. Parasites such as *Trichinella* and *Toxoplasma* may be present. Improper handling can cause bacterial contamination as well as off-flavors. Dress game in

the field right after shooting. Dressed meat must be chilled as soon as possible. Keep the game cold, below 40 °F, until it can be cooked or frozen. For more information about wild game, see [HGIC 3516, \*Safe Handling of Wild Game Meats\*](#).

### Roasting

Holidays are times when people tend to spend more money for a specialty meat. These fancy meats and poultry may cost more because they are exceptionally tender or high quality. Roasting is the recommended method for cooking tender meats. To roast, meat is placed on a rack in a shallow, uncovered pan and is cooked by the indirect dry heat of an oven. To keep the meat tender and minimize shrinkage due to the evaporation of moisture, a moderately slow oven temperature of 325 °F should be used.

USDA does not recommend cooking meat and poultry at oven temperatures lower than 325 °F because these foods could remain in the “Danger Zone” (temperatures of 40 °F to 140 °F) too long. Bacteria which may be present on these foods multiply rapidly at these temperatures. Boned and rolled meats require more cooking time per pound than bone-in cuts because it takes longer for the heat to penetrate through the solid meat. See table below for roasting times of holiday meats.

Always use a food thermometer when cooking meat and poultry to determine “doneness”. Cook raw beef, lamb, pork and veal steaks, roasts and chops to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating. For reasons of personal preference, meat may be cooked to higher temperatures. Cook all poultry and wild game to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

## Background on Holiday Meats

**Beef and Veal:** Beef and veal are leaner these days so overcooking them will dry the meat. Be sure to cook all raw beef and veal steaks, roasts, and chops to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F and allow meat to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.

**Lamb:** Technically, “Spring lamb” is meat from lambs slaughtered from March to the first week in October. The term comes from the time when lambs born in harsh winter weather would have little chance to survive until the next year. Today, with more protected animal husbandry conditions, enjoying “lamb” (meat from sheep about one year old) need not be confined to a particular season of the year.

Some people may view lamb as a fatty meat. However, leg and loin lamb meat has a similar fat content to lean beef and pork loin when trimmed of visible fat. The “fell” is a paper-like covering on lamb and is usually removed from steaks and chops at the retail market. Leave the fell on leg roasts to help retain shape.

**Pork:** Because hogs are about 50 percent leaner than they were 25 years ago, today’s pork cooks faster and can dry out when overcooked. Years ago when pork had more fat than it does today, the meat could be overcooked and still be fairly tender and flavorful. For safety as well as tenderness and flavor, cook today’s pork to at least 145 °F (medium-rare) and allow a 4 minute rest. Pork cooked to medium-rare doneness as measured with a meat thermometer, and then allowed to rest for 4 minutes before cooking or eating, may still be pink inside but will be safe.

**Wild Game:** To remove the "gamey" flavor, you can soak wild meat or poultry in a solution of either 1 tablespoon salt or 1 cup vinegar per quart of cold water. Use enough solution to cover the game completely and soak it overnight in the refrigerator. Discard the soaking solution before cooking. Wild game is leaner than its domestically raised counterpart. Trim any visible fat, which is where a gamey flavor can reside. Roast tender cuts of venison and game birds (if skinned) covered with oil-soaked cheesecloth or strips of bacon to prevent the meat from drying out. Set them on a rack in a shallow

pan and roast in the oven at 325 °F. Whole game birds should be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer in the innermost part of the thigh and wing, and the thickest part of the breast. Cook wild game meat to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

**Duck & Goose:** Most domestic ducks are the breed called White Peking. The term "Long Island" duck is a trade name. Domestic ducklings have a great deal of fat. While it helps them float when swimming, fat is undesirable in a cooked duck. Therefore, it is recommended to prick or score the skin of a whole duck before cooking, so that much of the fat will render out. Although domestic geese are larger than ducks, they are cooked in the same manner. Oven cooking bags are helpful for cooking these birds because they hold the fat for easy disposal and keep the oven spatter-free.

**Capons & Cornish Hens:** These specialty birds are chickens. Cornish hens are small broiler-fryers weighing 1 to 2 pounds. Capons are male chickens, which are surgically unsexed; weighing about 4 to 7 pounds, they have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Roast them as you would any chicken.

## Leftovers

**Basic Tips:** Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator; avoid placing large pots of stew or gravy in the refrigerator to cool since it will likely take until the next day for this amount of food to cool. For foods like ham, lamb and brisket, carve the remaining meat off the bone and store in small shallow containers in the refrigerator and use within three to four days. For frozen storage, wrap meat in heavy foil or freezer wrap or place in a freezer container. For optimum taste, use meat within two to three months. Do not taste food that looks or smells strange. **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

### Sources:

1. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. *Roasting Those “Other” Holiday Meats*. May 2011. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/roasting\\_those\\_other\\_holiday\\_meats/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/roasting_those_other_holiday_meats/index.asp)
2. U.S. FDA. (2009.) *FDA Food Code*. <http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/default.htm>

## Holiday Meat Roasting Chart

Type of Meat	Oven °F	Approximate Timing	Minimum Internal Temperature & Rest Time
<b>Beef, Fresh</b>			
Beef, rib roast, bone-in; 4–8 lbs.	325	23–30 Minutes/lb	145 °F and allow to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
Beef, rib roast, boneless, 4 lbs.	325	39–43 Minutes/lb	
Beef, eye round roast; 2–3 lbs.	325	20–22 Minutes/lb	
Beef, tenderloin roast, whole; 4–6 lbs.	425	45–60 Minutes total	
Beef, tenderloin roast, half, 2–3 lbs.	425	35–45 Minutes total	
<b>Lamb</b>			
Lamb, leg, bone-in; 5–9 lbs.	325	20–26 Minutes/lb	145 °F and allow to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
Lamb, leg, boneless; 4–lbs.			
Lamb, crown roast; 5 lbs.	375	20–30 Minutes/lb	
<b>Pork, Fresh</b>			
Pork loin roast, bones-in; 3–5 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb	145 °F and allow to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
Pork loin roast boneless; 2–4 lbs.	325	23–33 Minutes/lb	
Pork, crown roast; 6–10 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb	
Pork, tenderloin; ½–1½ lbs.	425	20–30 Minutes total	
<b>Pork, Cured</b>			
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; whole, 14–16 lbs.	325	18–20 Minutes/lb	145 °F and allow to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; half, 7–8 lbs.	325	22–25 Minutes/lb	
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; whole, 14–16 lbs.	325	15–18 Minutes/lb	140 °F
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; half, 7–8 lbs.	325	18–25 Minutes/lb	
Ham, fully cooked, boneless; 3–4 lbs.	325	27–33 Minutes/lb	
<b>Veal</b>			
Veal, boneless roast, rump or shoulder; 2–3 lbs.	325	25–30 Minutes/lb	145 °F and allow to rest for 4 minutes before carving or eating.
Veal, bone-in roast, loin; 3–4 lbs.	325	30–34 Minutes/lb	
<b>Game</b>			
Venison, round, rump, loin, rib roast; 3–4 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb	165 °F
Duck, wild, whole	350	18–20 Minutes/lb	
Goose, wild, whole	325	20–25 Minutes/lb	
Pheasant, young, whole; 2 lb	350	30 Minutes/lb	
Quail, whole	425	20 Minutes total	
<b>Poultry*</b>			
Capon, whole; 4–8 lbs.	375	20–30 Minutes/lb	165 °F
Cornish hens, whole; 18–24 ounces	350	50–60 Minutes total	
Duck, domestic, whole	375	20 Minutes/lb	
Goose, domestic, whole	325	20–25 Minutes/lb	
*Times are for unstuffed poultry. Add 15-30 minutes for stuffed birds. The internal temperature should reach 165 F in the center of the stuffing.			

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