

An 8-Day Holiday

Meal Timeline



Hosting a big holiday meal, especially if you've never done it before, can be a bit stressful. Making sure the house is presentable and the food is warm and tasty is no small feat, so to make sure everything gets done in time, planning is key.

Even if you're a go-with-the-flow kind of person, this is the one time of year that you might want to consider mapping out a good game plan so you can actually enjoy the big holiday! Here is your 10-day holiday meal countdown — a timeline of what to do 8 days leading up to the big holiday meal.

8 Days before the Holiday Meal: Making the Plan

- **Plan your menu** taking into consideration oven space and use of other cooking equipment like slow cookers or electric roasters.
- **If you are serving turkey**, decide on the size of the turkey, how to prepare it and whether you are buying a fresh or frozen turkey. Check your roasting pan to see if it is big enough and that it will fit in the oven!
- **Finalize the menu:** Share the preparation with family and friends to give yourself a break. This is the time to finalize who's bringing what. And even if you're not doing a potluck-style holiday meal, if guests offer to bring something, don't turn them down. An extra dessert, wine, cheese and cured meats for appetizers, and of course, ice, are all welcome things at the holidays. Avoid assigning dishes that need to be cooked at the last minute or reheated, if at all possible.
- **Decide on your serving dishes:** Pull out all your serving platters and dishes and label what dish goes in them with sticky notes. This not only ensures you have enough serving dishes, but makes it save time at mealtime. Don't forget trays for appetizers and desserts.
- **Make two shopping lists:** The first list is for things you can buy tomorrow. Pick up all the ingredients that will last until the holiday meal and the turkey, if you are buying frozen. Make a second list of perishables that you'll need on your second (and final) shopping trip. Figure out what dishes you'll be making ahead and make sure it's on the shopping list for this week.
- **Check your kitchen first:** Be sure to check your pantry and refrigerator / freezer to see what you already have, especially check for staples like spices, flour, salt, pepper, and



cornstarch. Don't forget to check expiration dates! Check for essentials like food thermometer, potato masher or other utensils.

1 Week before the Holiday Meal: Let's go Shopping!

- **Clean out your fridge:** Your refrigerator is going to be holiday meal central, so clean out your refrigerator before you go shopping so you have plenty of space for the extra food, especially the turkey.
- **Shopping trip #1:** Grab your first shopping list and hop to it! It's also a great time to hit up the liquor store to stock up on wine and drink essentials.

6 Days before the Holiday Meal: Thaw the Turkey!

- **Turkey:** If you bought a frozen turkey, start defrosting it in the refrigerator now! This is the safest method because the turkey will thaw at a consistent, safe temperature. Allow one day for each 4 - 5 pounds of weight. If your turkey weighs 16 pounds, it will take about four days to thaw. Once thawed, the turkey is safe for another two days, so you can start thawing it six days before the meal. The last thing you want is a frozen bird the morning of the big meal.

4-5 Days before the Holiday Meal: Start Cooking

Make-ahead is your friend: So many parts of the holiday meal can be made ahead. If there are dishes that you can make ahead and freeze, do it now so there will be less to do closer to the big day.

2-3 Days before the Holiday Meal: Final Shopping Trip

- **Shopping Trip #2:** Grab everything else you'll need for the big day!
- **Prep ahead:** Make cranberry sauce or salad and do other prep like washing and chopping vegetables, cutting bread for stuffing, and anything else that will make the next few days go more smoothly.
- **Defrost:** Start to defrost frozen dishes in the refrigerator at least two days before.



The Day before the Holiday Meal

- **Make your desserts:** Make your pies and desserts.
- **Clean and trim your vegetables:** Wash salad greens, trim green beans and mushrooms, and generally take care of as much vegetable prep as you can.

- **Things to consider making ahead:** If you have the time, make your stuffing and other casseroles today so they are ready to pop in the oven tomorrow.
- Chill drinks and make sure there is enough ice in the freezer.



The Night before the Holiday Meal

- **Set the table:** Get everything all set up so you can shift your focus towards cooking the next day.

The Big Holiday Meal Day

- **Desserts:** Bake your desserts a few hours before dinner so oven is available for other dishes later.
- **Mashed potatoes:** Make mashed potatoes early and keep warm in a slower cooker.
- **Turkey:** Turkey should be done at least an hour before the meal. Remove from the oven, cover with foil and let it rest for 30 minutes. If carving ahead, do it about 30 minutes before dinner and cover with foil to keep warm.
- **Gravy:** Make gravy from the turkey drippings or use pre-made gravy and keep it warm until serving time.
- **Side dishes:** Cook or reheat side dishes.
- **Fill water glasses and pitchers:** Designate someone to fill up water glasses and pitchers.
- **Fill serving dishes:** Recruit help to transferring everything into their designated serving platters and place them on the buffet or dining table.
- **Get ready for tea and coffee:** Fill tea kettles and coffee pots with water and get everything set up for dessert time.
- **Heat up pies:** Place pies in a turned-off but warm oven right before you sit down for dinner and they'll be the perfect temperature for dessert.
- **Clean up the kitchen:** If you have the luxury of time or a helpful guest, wash all the dishes used in preparation now to clear space for after the meal.



And then it's time to eat and enjoy!