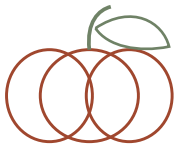
Thanksgiving Hosting Prep Checklist



A calm countdown to Thursday, November 26, 2026

Guests: _____ Dinner time: _____ Turkey size: _____ Dietary needs: _____

The Countdown

Now through Nov 1: Decide the big things

- [ ] Lock in your headcount, including kids, and send a clear start time
- [ ] Ask about allergies and dietary needs before you finalize the menu
- [ ] Write the full menu. Decide what you will make and what guests will bring
- [ ] Check that your oven and fridge fit the turkey you want
- [ ] Count chairs, plates, glasses and serving dishes. Note what to borrow or buy
- [ ] Order or reserve a fresh turkey if you are going that route

Nov 2 to 8: Pantry reset and non-perishable shopping

- [ ] Do the pantry reset (page 2)
- [ ] Buy shelf-stable ingredients: broth, canned pumpkin, evaporated milk, sugar, flour, baking powder, spices
- [ ] Buy a frozen turkey now if you prefer, and clear freezer space
- [ ] Order anything you need online while shipping is still relaxed

Nov 9 to 15: Tableware and the house

- [ ] Wash and iron table linens, polish serving pieces, test candles and lighters
- [ ] Get the guest bathroom ready: hand towels and extra toilet paper
- [ ] Choose a spot for coats and bags so the entryway stays clear
- [ ] Plan a self-serve drink station so you are not playing bartender

Nov 16 to 21: Fridge reset and final menu

- [ ] Do the fridge reset (page 2)
- [ ] Fill in your day-of schedule (page 3), working backward from dinner time
- [ ] Make a perishables list and plan to shop early in the week
- [ ] Make ahead what freezes well, like pie dough and dinner rolls

Nov 22 to 24: Thaw, shop, and prep

- [ ] Start thawing the turkey on schedule (see the thaw table)
- [ ] Buy all fresh produce, dairy and bread
- [ ] Make cranberry sauce, which keeps well in the fridge
- [ ] Set the table, label serving dishes with sticky notes, set up the drink station

Wednesday, Nov 25: The day before

- [ ] Bake pies, chop vegetables, assemble casseroles that can be made ahead
- [ ] Move drinks into the cooler to open up fridge space
- [ ] Empty and wipe the dishwasher so it is ready for the first load
- [ ] Take out the trash and recycling and put fresh bags in the cans

My Menu

Resets, Thawing, and the Big Day

The Pantry Reset (about an hour)

- [ ] Pull everything off one shelf at a time
- [ ] Check dates. Toss expired cans and stale spices. Replace baking powder if unsure of its age
- [ ] Group by job: baking supplies, canned sides, guest snacks
- [ ] Make a "Thanksgiving shelf" for everything bought for the menu
- [ ] Write the shopping list while you are in there, with exact quantities

The Fridge Reset (the week before)

- [ ] Clear out expired condiments and forgotten leftovers
- [ ] Wipe down shelves and drawers with warm soapy water, then dry
- [ ] Check the temperature: fridge at 40°F or below, freezer at 0°F
- [ ] Give the bottom shelf to the turkey, on a rimmed tray or in a roasting pan
- [ ] Dedicate a shelf to make-ahead dishes and label containers
- [ ] Move drinks to a cooler of ice
- [ ] Leave one shelf mostly empty for Thursday night leftovers

Turkey Thaw Schedule (in the fridge)

About 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds, in a fridge at 40°F or below (USDA). Slower end of the range shown, for a little cushion.

Turkey size	Thaw time	Move to fridge by
12 pounds	About 3 days	Mon, Nov 23
16 pounds	About 4 days	Sun, Nov 22
20 pounds	About 5 days	Sat, Nov 21

Running behind? Cold water thawing: about 30 minutes per pound, change the water every 30 minutes, leak-proof bag, and cook right away. Never thaw on the counter, in the garage, or on the porch.

Thanksgiving Day

- [ ] Take the turkey out of the fridge on schedule. Cook until the breast, the innermost thigh and the wing all reach 165°F
- [ ] Set out the drink station and a few appetizers
- [ ] Post your day-of schedule (page 3) on the fridge so helpers can see what is next
- [ ] Say yes when a guest offers help. Hand them a specific job
- [ ] Set a reminder to put food away within 2 hours of cooking

The Leftovers Plan

- [ ] Slice turkey off the bone and pack it in shallow, covered containers
- [ ] Label every container with the contents and the date
- [ ] Reheat leftovers to 165°F and bring gravy to a boil
- [ ] Freeze extra portions before Monday, Nov 30
- [ ] Send guests home with a container

Refrigerated leftovers are good for 3 to 4 days, so Monday, November 30 is the last day to eat them or freeze them.

Notes

Food safety questions on the day? USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

Get the full guide with tips and the shopping list at lifewithamanda.com/thanksgiving-hosting-prep-checklist

Menu and Day-of Schedule

The Menu

Dish	Made or brought by	Oven?
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐
		☐

Tip: write down who is bringing what as soon as guests say yes, and note which dishes need the oven so you can plan your oven time.

Your Day-of Schedule

Dinner served at: _____

Time	What happens
_____	*Turkey out of the fridge*
_____	*Turkey in the oven*
_____	*Sides and casseroles in the oven*
_____	*Turkey out to rest*
_____	*Carve and plate*
_____	*Dinner served*
_____	*Food put away (within 2 hours)*
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	
_____	

Roasting time depends on your turkey's size and your oven, so check the package or your recipe. Work backward from dinner time and add a little cushion.

Post this page on the fridge so helpers can see what is next.