

Thanksgiving menu returns – with changes

Supply woes, better home cooks spell change for holiday



Submitted photo

A freezer full of turkeys sits ready for customers at Albrecht's Delafield Market.

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WAUKESHA — Family tables may look a bit different this Thanksgiving. That's partly due to cost saving adaptations made in a time of inflation and supply chain issues, but also due to home cooks — many having honed skills in 2020 — seeking to provide a more refined experience this year.

Prices may fluctuate a bit, but outright shortages are not expected. "We're not going to run out of turkeys," said Wisconsin Grocers Association President Brandon Scholz.

But we might not see the particular selection or variety we have in mind if we don't plan ahead. Scholz said, for example, a customer might be seeking a 10 pound turkey and only find 14 pounders. "There's going to be limitations," he said.

There's been some challenges with cranberries too, but that shouldn't keep them off families' tables this year. They're still available canned and in whole produce, but depending on day-to-day circumstances for the former variety, not every brand will be available every day.

Albrecht's Delafield Market family co-owner Kerry Jeanpierre said the metal used for canning is the crux of the issue; that's what's making cranberries trickier than normal in a state that produces so many.

An advisable strategy is picking up frozen or canned goods early, as they'll stay good until Thanksgiving and will be one less thing to worry about. "Once they see something on sale they should purchase it because they can keep it on their shelf a couple weeks," Jeanpierre said.

Scholz advises shopping early, especially for turkeys and cranberries. "When you know everybody is going to be shopping for the same thing, best advice, go in early and know what you're looking for," he said.

Rising prices, adapting menus

Waukesha County Technical College Culinary

Instructor Andy Tenaglia said he's been seeing prices rise, especially for beef. As an instructor and restaurant professional, he's seeking alternatives to premiums like beef tenderloins or New York strips and mulling the possibility of turning to wagyu beef instead or going from tenderloin to sirloin and making the cuts himself.

Tenaglia also pointed out several restaurants have options for locals that can help get food on their tables for the big day.

Ducks, a popular poultry item for the holidays, have risen in price too. Tenaglia said instead of getting ducks from New Jersey, he's turned to buying pheasants from MacFarlane farms in Janesville instead.

Adapting menus, although daunting for some at first, can also open up opportunities for innovation and elevation. "Making your own stocks is always viable," Tenaglia said.

Jack Birren, another WCTC culinary instructor, said he likes to elevate his mashed potatoes by opting for "just under a 3-1 ratio" of potatoes to parsnips.

Swapping a financial investment for a time investment can pay off in some areas. "I think it's way better to make your own stuffing than to buy it," Birren said. "It's a little bit more prep work, but not much."

Evidently, some innovating and elevating has already been going on in local home kitchens.

Roberts Specialty Meats Owner Paul Roberts said he's seeing customers doing spatchcocked turkeys, marinated and brined turkeys, deep fried turkeys, and putting the — in some cases recently purchased — smokers to good use for smoked turkeys.

There's even articles circulating online extolling the virtues of the Turkey Wellington.

"A good thing that happened with COVID is it actually brought families closer together," Roberts said. As families have reacquainted themselves with unhurried cooking, their palates have gone exploring. Roberts said he's taken some orders for prime ribs and pork for

Roasted Turkey Stock

- 4 pounds turkey bones
- 6 quarts water
- 2 onions, large dice, skin on
- 2 carrots, large dice
- 2 celery stalks, large dice
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 thyme sprigs
- 5 parsley sprigs

Preparation

1. Roast bones at 425dg for 30 minutes. When bones begin to color add vegetable and continue roast until nicely brown about another 30 minutes.
2. Combine all ingredients in a large stockpot. Bring to a boil over high heat, then turn down to a simmer.
3. Skim off any foam that rises to the surface.
4. Simmer the stock for 6 to 8 hours, covered; keeping an eye on it to make sure it stays at a simmer.
5. Strain the stock through a fine-meshed sieve. Let cool.
6. Scrape the fat that rises to the top. (Reserve for your roux.) Yields about one gallon.

Turkey Veloute

- 3 ounces turkey fat
- 3 ounces flour
- 1 shallot
- Salt and pepper to taste

Gravy is an addition to your Thanksgiving meal but how about bringing a classic French mother sauce to the table to step up this year's bounty? Traditionally the bones are not roasted and the finished sauce is blond but I think a deeper color (from the extra Maillard reaction) makes for a pleasing sauce.

1. Melt the reserved, solid turkey fat in a sauce pan.
2. Add three ounces of flour (rice is preferred for gluten free, all-purpose wheat is fine too.)
3. Cook over medium heat until a nutty, moderately dark color is achieved.
4. Add your chilled stock and whisk until a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cook about 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and strain again through a fine sieve.
5. For a very indulgent sauce mount the veloute with whole butter cut into squares while the sauce is warm. The sauce must then be kept warm, about 150dg or the butter will break similar to a Hollandaise.

Source: Andy Tenaglia, inspired by Marie Carême

Thanksgiving and his shop offers the fabled "turducken" — a deboned chicken stuffed into a deboned duck stuffed into a turkey. "Everybody kind of has their own little thing," Roberts said.

Families are now confident enough to determine their favorite cuts and make purchases accordingly, buying a more modest-sized turkey for the whole bird experience, then grabbing some extra thighs or drumsticks on the side.

A trend Jeanpierre's noticed is more hams selling than usual for this time of the year — they're more often associated with Christmas time. "I think they look at it, and it's affordable," she said.

Jeanpierre is confident customers will be able to find the products they need, but depending on the day, it might not be the particular brand they have in mind. Shipments have been inconsistent for grocers and others lately.

"I think we're going to see more gatherings, bigger gatherings this year, because the large turkeys are selling fast," she said.

When it comes to precision, Jeanpierre said store staff are good at helping families know just how much of a product they need for the big day.