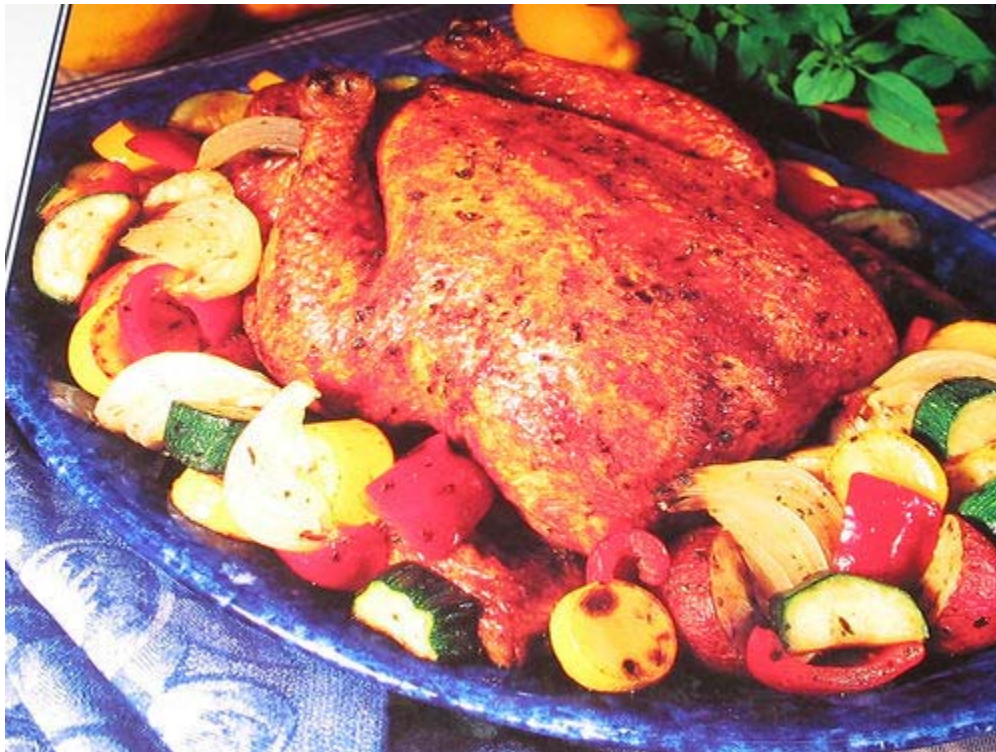




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How to Fix Thanksgiving Meal Disasters



There's a good reason Thanksgiving comes but once a year: Pulling off the orchestrated feat of a stuffed bird, and whipping up a dozen sides and baked desserts for a crowd isn't easy. With that much food cooking simultaneously, it's highly likely that something will go very wrong.

Worse, there isn't always a fast fix. You can't exactly pop another turkey in the oven at the last minute, and most grocery stores aren't open for you to pick up an extra bag of cranberries or a replacement pie.

The good news is that you don't have to serve an over-dry turkey, or that you can't salvage lumpy gravy. Here's how chefs and home cooks suggest salvaging common Thanksgiving meal disasters:

The problem: Lumpy gravy

As we mentioned in [a previous article](#), either put the gravy through a quick pass in the blender or let it drain through a sieve. That will break up and/or remove the larger lumps.

The problem: Not enough food

"Rather than serving the meal family style, you can plate out the dishes," says registered dietician Jackie Newgent, author of "Big Green Cookbook." "Your guests will feel like they're getting exceptional service."

This way, everyone gets a little of everything.

The problem: Frozen turkey

Real Simple suggests putting the bird in a cold-water bath, breast-side down, and in its original packaging. This can speed things along, with results in as little as a half hour.

The problem: Oven malfunction

Make a plan for what needs to be in the oven when, for how long, and at what temp. Then do a dry run to make sure the various pans all fit. Mint.com reader Wendy Pierce says the first Thanksgiving she cooked (for 18 people!) she took her turkey pan to the supermarket to make sure the bird would fit. “I got everything ready and went to put the bird in the oven and the door wouldn’t close — the pan was too big!” she says. “I ended up waking up my husband and he went out back of our building and banged the lip of the iron pan up so it would fit.”

The problem: Dry turkey

The best measures are preventative, including basting and brining, but Frugal Foodie is a big believer in gravy as another impromptu fixer. Make sure there’s plenty on hand to offset the dryness. It also helps to let the cooked bird rest for at least 30 minutes after taking it out of the oven, which lets the juices redistribute.

The problem: Thin cranberry sauce.

Add fresh fruit, Newgent says. “Stir in fresh chopped orange or tangerine segments,” she says. “Add a pinch of cinnamon or mint, if you wish, and sprinkle with some of the citrus zest.” Frugal Foodie has also added fresh apples, and chopped dried apricots to her cranberry sauce.

The problem: Sink backup

Roto-Rooter reports a 51% increase in calls on the day after Thanksgiving, largely to remove clogs of kitchen scraps that shouldn’t have made it down the drain in the first place. “If you notice trouble, don’t put anything else down the drain and don’t try to use a chemical drain cleaner,” says ServiceMagic.com. It’s unlikely to work and more likely to leave the sink-full of chemicals you’d rather not have near the food.

The problem: Too much salt.

If it’s the turkey, try a fast rinse and drain to get the salt off the skin. For the sides, try adding other components to make the dish seem less salty. “Check your freezer for any package of plain frozen veggies, like spinach, peas, or carrots. Steam them for a minute on the stovetop or in the microwave, and then puree them in a food processor with the potatoes,” Newgent says.

Frugal Foodie is a journalist based in New York City who spends her days writing about [personal finance](#) and obsessing about what she’ll have for dinner. Chat with her on Twitter through @MintFoodie <http://www.twitter.com/mintfoodie>.