

## [Brandywine Table]

# Let's NOT Talk Turkey

Laura Muzzi Brennan

### IS THIS THE YEAR TO TRY SOMETHING NEW?

**A**T THE RISK OF INCITING THE IRE OF THE THANKSGIVING gods, this year I'm keeping mum on the subject of turkey.

No, I haven't turned my back on the beloved bird. I'm simply being responsive to the many folks who find that even a medium-sized gobbler is too big for their small guest list. And then there are those who've confessed in hushed tones that turkey is not their be-all, end-all. These folks just want to try a new main dish, maybe a roast of pork, maybe a goose. For them, I offer this column.

With 30 years of food service experience, butcher Bill Ringsdorf has prepared and eaten many a Thanksgiving dinner. He started out as a prep and line cook in various local restaurants. He co-owned Exton's Grapevine restaurant with his wife, worked as the sous chef at Longwood Gardens, and served as food and beverage director of Downingtown Golf Club for a number of years.

In June of this year, Bill and his wife, Jeanie, opened **O'Connor's Market** in Guthriesville. (O'Connor is Jeanie's maiden name.) O'Connor's offers high quality meats and cold-cuts and essential groceries. "Our goal is to help people cook for themselves again," says Ringsdorf. "We want to supply them with good, quality ingredients and get them back in their own kitchens."

Even in your own kitchen, though, preparing the centerpiece of Thanksgiving dinner can be intimidating, especially when you're upending tradition. The best way to begin is to purchase your fresh meat or poultry a day or so in advance of cooking. If you must buy frozen, defrost it in the refrigerator for a few days. "You can't expect to get a frozen Cornish hen or duck, thaw it quickly and have it taste great," says Ringsdorf.

You also need to choose wisely. Your butcher can help you decide which duck or goose, pork or beef roast looks best. Be sure to ask how much to buy per person and whether the meat was previously frozen.

If you can't talk to a butcher, Ringsdorf offers a few guidelines.



Plan on 6–10 ounces per person including bones and skin. That way, you won't run out of meat and your guests can have seconds. When buying pork and beef, look for firm flesh and fat that's light pinkish-white, not grey. Remember that fat keeps meat from drying out and adds flavor, so opt for some fat outside and marbling within.

For poultry, choose birds with a solid color throughout. If the flesh is washed out, that's not your bird. And whether you want poultry or meat, choose cuts with almost no aroma and little to no liquid in the packaging because liquid often indicates the presence of preservatives.

When it comes to cooking, Ringsdorf has a couple of suggestions. One, use a meat thermometer. This inexpensive tool can truly save the day. And two, keep in mind that cooking meat to perfection is not a race. It's about reaching the right internal temperature in the ideal amount of time. Bottom line: low and slow is the way to go.

This Thanksgiving, whether you talk turkey or learn a new language, I hope every bite is worthy of thanks.

## Boneless Beef Rib Roast with Garlic, Herbs and Pan Gravy

Recipe courtesy of Bill Ringsdorf, O'Connor's Market.



- 3–4 lb. beef ribeye, whole, trimmed and unsliced
- 3 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. chopped garlic
- ½ C. red wine
- 2 C. prepared beef broth
- ¼ C. all-purpose flour

Heat the oven to 425°. Place the beef in a roasting pan, rib side down.

Remove leaves from herbs and coarsely chop. Discard stems. Mix herbs, salt, pepper and garlic, then spread mixture evenly on top of roast.

Roast for 20 minutes at 425°. Then reduce heat to 300° and cook for an additional 1 to 1½ hours for medium rare or longer for desired doneness.

Remove roast from oven, place the beef on a cutting board, and allow roast to rest for 15–20 minutes before slicing.

Spoon off fat from pan drippings. Place roasting pan on stovetop over medium-high heat, add red wine and gently stir with a wooden spoon, scraping any brown bits from the roasting pan. Reduce heat to medium for 5 minutes. Pour wine mixture through a sieve into a 2-quart saucepan.

In a bowl, whisk together beef broth and flour. Place saucepan over medium heat. Slowly add broth mixture to the saucepan, stirring with a whisk. Cook for 5 minutes until gravy boils and thickens to your liking. Strain again, if needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Present roast and gravy tableside before serving for an elegant holiday meal.

Makes 6–8 servings.

## What's on Your Thanksgiving Table?

In true American melting pot style, many local cooks supplement turkey and stuffing with dishes that reflect their heritage or guests' diverse tastes. Here's a peek inside their Thanksgiving pots.

"The Italian side of my family often has lasagna in addition to the turkey. One branch of my family was Italian and the other three were Ashkenazi Jewish, so we also alternate soups between escarole and matzah ball." – Jennifer M.

"Since my family has Kentucky roots, we serve garlic cheese grits." – Kath H.

Note: Food historians believe corn grits – minus cheese – were on the first Thanksgiving menu in 1621.

"As a side, we have a fried rice dish without Asian flavorings. It's got veggies and

sometimes, chopped sausage. We fry it until crispy. We always have tortellini in chicken broth and escarole soup with very small chicken meatballs." – Enza D.

"I had vegetarians coming to Thanksgiving last year so I made butternut squash vegducken from an Epicurious recipe. It was delicious but a lot of work!" [www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/vegducken](http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/vegducken). – Cara H.

"My grandmother always hosted Thanksgiving, but her help was off on Thursday so we celebrated on Friday with turkey and sweet and sour meatballs." – Jill F.

"My family always has a holiday soup before the meal, which also includes ravioli and lasagna. We are very Italian!" – Kim S.

### Sauerbraten

With a nod to his German heritage, Bill Ringsdorf sometimes makes this dish for Thanksgiving dinner.

- ½ small onion, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 2 oz. pickling spice
- 1½ C. water
- 1½ C. red wine vinegar
- 1 Tb. white sugar
- 1 Tb. salt
- 1 Tb. ground black pepper
- 3–4 lb. beef bottom round or rump roast
- ¼ C. all-purpose flour
- 2 Tb. vegetable oil
- 12 gingersnaps cookies, crumbled

In a large glass bowl, mix onion, carrot, celery, pickling spice, water, vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Whisk together to make marinade. Place beef roast in marinade. Cover and refrigerate for 3–5 days, turning meat daily. To prepare, remove meat from marinade and pat dry with paper towels, reserving marinade.

Lightly coat marinated beef with flour on all sides. In a Dutch oven or large pot, heat vegetable oil over medium heat. Place beef in pot and brown on all sides, about 10 minutes. Pour marinade over seared beef, cover and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until beef is very tender, about 3½ to 4 hours. Beef should pull apart with a fork.

Remove beef to a cutting board, allow to rest 15 minutes, and slice.

Strain all solids from beef cooking liquids, and cook over medium heat. Add gingersnap cookies and simmer until gravy is thickened and gingersnaps have softened, 10 minutes. Serve gravy over sliced beef.

Makes 6–8 servings.

### Roast Pork Loin with Chestnut Dressing

Recipe courtesy of Bill Ringsdorf.



For the pork:

- 3–4 lbs. pork loin, trimmed
- Salt and pepper to taste

For the dressing:

- 2 C. chestnuts, whole
- 1½ C. butter
- ½ C. chopped onion
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. fresh parsley
- 1 lb. dry or lightly toasted bread, cubed
- 3 eggs
- ¼ C. milk

Preheat oven to 350°. Season pork loin with salt and pepper to taste and place in oven. Roast pork until internal temperature is

145° when tested with a meat thermometer. Allow to rest for 15 minutes before carving.

Prepare dressing while the pork is roasting. Carefully cut slits in the surface of chestnuts with a sharp paring knife. Place chestnuts in a medium saucepan, cover with water, and bring to a boil. Cook for 25 minutes or until soft and tender. Drain, peel and chop chestnuts.

Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir in chestnuts, onion, salt, pepper and parsley. Cook until onions are tender, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a baking dish and mix with cubed bread.

In a small bowl, beat eggs and milk together and pour over bread and onion mixture.

Bake dressing 30–45 minutes until crisp and browned. Serve with roast pork.

Makes 6–8 servings.

### Alternative: Stuffed Roast Pork

Prepare the chestnut dressing in advance as above.

To clean the raw pork, place on a cutting board, fat cap up. From the side, split pork lengthwise but do not cut all the way through, leaving a ½–1" seam. Open pork loin and lightly pound with a meat tenderizer to ½–¾" thick.

Place cooked stuffing inside open pork loin. Fold over and tie with butcher's twine. Roast pork in 350° oven until internal temperature of the pork and the stuffing reaches 165°. Rest stuffed pork for 15 minutes before slicing.

Makes 6–8 servings.

### Cornish Hens with Mushroom Stuffing

*The birds I cooked for this recipe weighed 2¼ lbs. each (before I removed giblets), so I planned one hen for every two people. With smaller hens, each person gets a bird.*



## Thanksgiving Deer

Turkey may be central to modern day Thanksgivings, but historically, it shared the table with other poultry and meat.

In his account of the 1621 harvest celebration—the only surviving eyewitness record of the event—colonist Edward Winslow mentions just two foods: wildfowl and deer. Noting that geese, ducks and wild turkeys abounded in 17th-century New England, food historians believe these birds graced the first Thanksgiving table.

But the forgotten star of that menu was

deer. Colonists considered venison a high-status food because back in England, only the landed gentry, who owned the parks and forests populated by deer, enjoyed this delicacy. When the Wampanoag presented five deer to the Colonists as a sign of respect and friendship, the Colonists were thrilled ...and oh so hungry!

To read more about Thanksgiving foods and traditions, look for *Giving Thanks* by Kathleen Curtin, Sandra L. Oliver and Plimoth Plantation.

#### For the stuffing:

6 Tb. unsalted butter, divided  
2 stalks celery, chopped into ¼–½" pieces (¾–1 C.)  
½ medium yellow onion, chopped (¾–1 C.)  
½ lb. button mushrooms, roughly chopped  
¼ C. parsley  
1 Tb. fresh sage (or to taste)  
½ tsp. celery salt (or to taste)  
½ lb. herb seasoned cubed stuffing  
2 C. chicken broth  
Salt and pepper to taste

#### For the hens:

1 large onion  
2, 2¼-lb. Cornish game hens\*  
Olive oil  
Salt and pepper to taste

\* If frozen, thaw hens in refrigerator for 1–2 days.

Preheat oven to 400°.

#### To make the stuffing:

Melt 4 Tb. butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add celery and onion and cook for 5 minutes until they start to soften, stirring frequently. Add 2 Tb. butter to skillet and melt. Stir in mushrooms and cook vegetable mixture for 3–5 more minutes. Turn off heat. Stir in parsley, sage and celery salt. Stir in stuffing cubes. Start adding broth ½ C. at a time to moisten mixture. You'll use between 1½–2 C.

#### To stuff and cook the hens:

Slice the onion into ¼–½" discs and place in a single layer in a casserole dish.

Remove giblets and save for another use. Rinse Cornish hens in a colander and pat dry. Salt the cavity.

Spoon 1½ C. stuffing inside each bird and tie legs together with twine. You'll have more than half the stuffing left over. Place it in a small casserole dish and set aside for later cooking.

Brush hens all over with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place breast side down on top of onions and roast for 30 minutes. Turn hens over and roast for another 30–50 minutes until stuffing and thickest part of the thigh register 165° on a meat thermometer. If breast starts to get too brown while cooking, cover loosely with aluminum foil. During the last 30 minutes of roasting hens, bake stuffing until top starts to brown and crisp.

Let hens sit for 10 minutes before serving. Serve with onions and extra stuffing.

Makes 4 servings.

### Roast Goose with Stuffing and Gravy

*If you opt for goose, which may have been at the first Thanksgiving, see sidebar, choose one that's young, small and with a thick layer of fat for tastiness.*



#### For the goose:

12-lb. goose  
Salt and pepper for seasoning  
1 lemon, optional

If frozen, defrost in the refrigerator at least two days, taking it out at least an hour before cooking. Reserve giblets for gravy. Save liver to make pâté. (See our online recipe at [CountyLinesMagazine.com](http://CountyLinesMagazine.com).)



Remove and save the highly prized fat, which can be melted slowly—rendered—over low heat. Brining the goose is recommended. That's done 12 to 24 hours in advance. (See our brining recipe online.)

Preheat oven to 350°. Prick the skin (just skin, not the meat) with a needle to help the juices flow. Rub the inside and out with salt and pepper, and lemon if desired.

Put breast-side up on a rack in a roasting pan. Baste with pan juices every 30 minutes. After an hour, reduce to 325°. Continue roasting until browned and done (juices run pink when the thigh is pricked).

Remove the rendered fat at least two or three times during roasting. Save it in a jar.

Let the goose rest for half an hour. Cut the wings at the body, severing at the second joint. Do the same with legs and thigh, removing each as one piece. Separate breast by slicing along the breastbone, carving along the ribs, so it comes off whole. Set breasts with skin up and slice into 1/3-inch medallions.

Serve with stuffing and gravy.

Serves 6 to 8.

#### *For the stuffing:*

4 C. wild rice, cooked  
2 C. sausage, cooked  
1/2 C. onion, sautéed  
1 C. dried apricots  
1/2 C. pistachios

Mix all the ingredients. Put stuffing in a separate covered casserole in the same oven.

Makes about 8 cups.

#### *For the gravy:*

Goose neck and giblets

1 Tb. oil  
1 carrot  
1 onion  
2–3 bay leaves  
2–3 tsp. of thyme  
2 C. cider  
4 C. stock  
2 Tb. goose fat  
4 Tb. flour

Sauté neck, giblets, carrot, onion, bay leaves and thyme in the oil. The meat should be brown and caramelized. Add cider and stock. Reduce liquid by half, and set aside.

Then heat the fat and flour and stir to

make a brown paste (the consistency of wet sand). Lower the heat and slowly pour in cider/stock and stir. Season to taste.

Put in a gravy boat and keep it warm. ♦

*Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother's Betty Crocker's Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 600+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.*



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