

## ***Brining the Thanksgiving Bird Can Make It More Moist***

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All families have a favorite method of preparing their Thanksgiving turkey to perfection. This year, I have had some questions about how to brine a turkey. Brining is a sort of “pre-soak” method that helps assure a moist, tasty turkey for one of our favorite meals of the year.

According to USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service, brining is a method of steeping the turkey in a strong solution of salt and water. Other ingredients can be added for flavor but the salt is what makes the turkey moist. Salt helps to dissolve the protein in muscle and the salt and protein reduce the moisture loss during the cooking process.

The entire turkey has to be completely submerged in the brining solution. For this reason, many people only brine their turkey when they are going to cook one weighing less than 14 pounds. It’s hard to find a container that will hold a turkey larger than that.

University of Illinois Extension gives the following instructions for brining: Start with a fresh or completely thawed turkey that has the giblets removed and has been washed inside and out. To make the brine, dissolve 4 cups of kosher salt or 2 cups of table salt in two gallons of cold water. Add one cup of sugar. Stir the mixture until the salt and sugar are completely dissolved. (You can add other flavoring ingredients as desired such as bay leaves, thyme, or you favorite poultry seasoning.)

Place the turkey breast side down in the solution, place the container in the refrigerator and soak for 6-8 hours. Remove the turkey from the brine and rinse it inside and out under cold running water. Pat the turkey dry. The turkey is then ready to be roasted. Another option is to place the turkey back in the refrigerator overnight after it has been patted dry. This allows the skin to dry out so it will become crisp during roasting.

The turkey is done when the temperature at the inner most part of the thigh, the breast and the wing all reach a minimum of 165 degrees. The thigh juices running clear and the leg wiggling freely are other signs the turkey is done.

For another brining recipe or to see more in-depth brining instructions see the University of Illinois web site at <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/turkey/techniques.html>.