

Thanksgiving: It's a Marathon – Not a Sprint

Fall 2008/volume 114

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On Thanksgiving, dinner takes center stage. At Christmas we get sidetracked by the guy in red. At Easter the bunny distracts us. But Thanksgiving is all about family and food, and maybe a little football. If you are hosting Thanksgiving this year, no need to panic. All you need is a good plan and maybe a little help. At least one or two friendly volunteers will probably pop up. Whether they offer to bring a pie, peel the potatoes or carve the bird, don't hesitate, accept!

For this feast of feasts, I offer you some of my tried and true recipes, timeline and the mantra, "it's a marathon, not a sprint."

The Menu

You may have your own favorites. If not, here are some of mine:

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup (*October 19th 2008*)

Roast Turkey and Wild Rice & Mushroom Stuffing (*Archives/November 11th 2007*)

Cranberry Sauce (*today!*)

Broccoli Puree (*today!*)

Smashed Potatoes (*you're on your own*)

Mixed Greens with Roasted Shallot Vinaigrette (*Archives/November 25th 2007*)

Apple Crisp with Vanilla Ice Cream (*Archives/October 14th 2007*)

You can find most of these recipes on-line at www.susannye.com. Recipes are organized by original publication date to help you find them quickly and easily.

The Timeline

Now:

If you are planning to cook a fresh turkey it is a good idea to order it in advance. If you haven't done it yet, do it now.

Saturday before Thanksgiving:

Grab a big mug of coffee or tea and clear everyone out of the kitchen. Take a deep breath. Organize your recipes and make your shopping list. When in doubt, check your cupboards. You don't want to discover that you are out of cinnamon on Thursday morning. Check expiration dates. If the sell-by date is May 1994, it's probably time to buy a new jar!

Now it's off to the supermarket. Buy any and all non-perishables on your list. Purchase the ingredients for the butternut squash soup. Pick up hardy produce like apples, potatoes and cranberries.

Sunday:

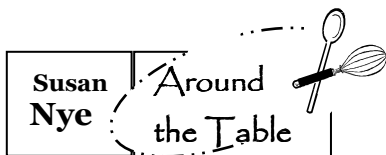
Roast and puree the vegetables for the butternut squash soup (steps 1-3). Store the puree in your freezer until Thursday morning.

Monday:

If you are using a frozen turkey, buy it and put it in the refrigerator to thaw.

Make the cranberry sauce:

Combine 12-ounces of fresh cranberries with 1 cup sugar, 1 cup orange juice, grated peel of 1 orange and a teaspoon each of cinnamon and ginger in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Transfer to a small bowl and let cool. Cover and refrigerate.



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More Monday:

Make the Roasted Shallot Vinaigrette and refrigerate.

Tuesday:

If you have a separate dining room, set and decorate the table. Need a quick, inexpensive centerpiece? Arrange gourds and a few ears of Indian corn in a basket; add some candles and your table will be picture perfect.

Wednesday:

Pick up your fresh turkey, perishable goods and any groceries you forgot on Saturday.

Make the stuffing and store it in the refrigerator.

Make the broccoli puree and store it in the refrigerator.

Turkey Day: Make the apple crisp.

Remove the squash puree from the freezer. Put it in a large soup pot to thaw. You can continue the recipe later.

Stuff and roast the turkey. (Don't forget to remove the neck and bag of giblets from the turkey's cavity.)

While the turkey is roasting:

Use the neck and giblets to make broth for gravy. Simmer the neck and giblets in chicken broth. Cool, remove the neck and then process the giblets until fine in the blender. Store the giblet broth in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Bake the broccoli puree.

Boil and smash the potatoes.

Prepare the salad (everything except the vinaigrette).

Finish the soup.

When your turkey has finished roasting:

Let it rest for twenty minutes or so.

Make the gravy. Don't forget the giblet broth.

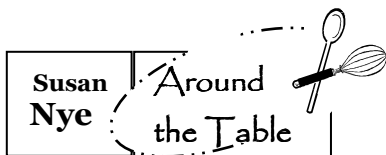
Carve the turkey.

Orchestrate the final chaos of getting everything into serving dishes and on the table.

Relax and enjoy!

Bon appétit! Happy Thanksgiving!

Susan



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Broccoli Purée

Serves 10-12

5 pounds of broccoli, trimmed, peeled and chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
3/4 cup sour cream
1 cup grated cheddar cheese
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
2 tablespoons butter plus enough to butter the casserole dish
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1. Drop the broccoli and onion into 4 quarts of boiling, salted water. Cook until tender, 8-10 minutes. Reserve some of the cooking liquid and drain the vegetables.
2. Purée the broccoli, onion and sour cream in batches in a food processor (add a little cooking liquid if needed). Return the broccoli mixture to the pot, add the cheese, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Mix well.
3. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
4. Butter a large, oven proof casserole dish. Spoon the broccoli mixture into the prepared dish, dot with butter.
5. Bake at 350 degrees for 30-45 minutes or until steaming hot.

The broccoli puree can be made 1 or 2 days ahead through step 4 (skipping step 3); cool, cover and refrigerate.