



# The Ultimate Thanksgiving Checklist to Save Your Holiday Stress Levels

Spend more time planning, and you'll spend less time panicking.

A **Thanksgiving** checklist is absolutely essential for the juggling act of hosting everyone's favorite feasting holiday. It'll help you stay organized and cross off as many to-dos as possible prior to the big day, so you can sit back and enjoy your guests (and a perfectly prepped turkey).

## Key Takeaways

- Plan your menu and coordinate with guests early to avoid last-minute stress.
- Organize your space and materials to streamline Thanksgiving preparations.
- Break tasks into manageable pieces and prepare as much as possible in advance for a smooth, enjoyable holiday.

## The Weekend Before

- **Make a detailed shopping list.** And check it—twice! But don't expect to get all your shopping done in one trip. Instead, divide your list into two parts: items you'll need in advance or that you have room to store until then, and items you'll need the final day or two before the meal. Planning a second trip not only keeps your refrigerator from groaning but also relieves you of having to remember every last stick of butter the first time around.
- **Determine when your turkey needs to start thawing.** If you're using a frozen bird, you may need to start as early as five to six days before Thanksgiving to [start the thawing process](#).
- **Prep the bar.** Now's the time to stock up on wine that goes with your meal, and anything you need to offer pre-feast cocktails for your guests.

## Tuesday

- **Prepare all chilled menu items.** Make and cover everything that will be served chilled (like [cranberry sauce](#)), place them in the refrigerator, and forget about them until serving time.
- **Pick up any table decor items you still need.** Flowers often need a few days to reach full bloom gorgeousness, so this is the perfect day to get your flowers, fruit, or other centerpiece items.

## Wednesday

- **Pick up the turkey.** If your turkey is not yet in your possession, this is the latest you want to pick it up.
- **Make your last grocery run.** Take inventory before making a second trip to the store ([Heavy cream](#)? [Tin foil](#)?) and grab any last-minute things you may have forgotten. Tip: Don't fear [store-bought gravy](#) or other timesavers!
- **Prep veggies and herbs.** Chop the onions and the celery, wash the herbs, and trim the rest of your vegetables. Pat them dry, cover, and refrigerate.
- **Assemble the stuffing.** Then transfer to a baking dish, and refrigerate.
- **Prep dessert.** Or assemble as much of it as you can—then refrigerate or bake it.
- **Start on sides.** Get a head start on any side dishes that can be made completely or partly in advance.
- **Calculate your turkey's roasting time.** Don't get hung up on questions of timing the day of. The night before, calculate exactly [how long you need to cook your turkey](#) so you'll know the exact time to put it in the oven based on what time you'd like to eat.
- **Set the table.** As long as the table you're using doesn't need to serve double duty as a prep space, set your table the night before so it's ready to go on the big day.
- **Set up the bar.** Put out any ingredients that can sit overnight, and slice limes, lemons, and any other garnishes so they're ready to go.

## Thanksgiving Day

- **Make any last dashes to the store.** If, like most people, you think of one last thing you need from the store on the big morning, call a trusted guest and ask if he or she could do you a favor and pop by the store—or maybe they have a stick of butter they can bring over.
- **Unload the dishwasher.** That way, you can easily load in dirty dishes as prep is happening and during the meal itself, to help minimize the post-feast stack.
- **Prep the turkey for roasting.** [Clean and prep your turkey](#) before popping it in the oven.
- **Make the sides.** While the turkey roasts, cook the side dishes.
- **Make the gravy.** While the turkey rests, make the gravy, assemble any last-minute sides, and rewarm the ones you made the day before.
- **Prep dessert.** Rewarm the dessert in the oven during dinner.

### SPECIAL NOTES:

**Whip cream.** To keep it fluffy, save the whipping for the last minute. For a head start, pour the cream into a mixing bowl and refrigerate (with the beaters) until dessert time. You'll get more volume and better texture if the cream, bowl, and beaters are cold when you start whipping.

**Teach old appliances new tricks.** Save oven space and burners for cooking, not reheating. [Slow cookers](#) can serve as chafing dishes, keeping meat, soups, and stews warm for hours. They can also be used for longer-cooking recipes, such as scalloped potatoes, meatballs, or even a hot dip. [Toaster ovens](#) can keep sides warm until serving and even bake a small casserole or dinner rolls, freeing oven space for larger dishes. And don't forget the [grill](#); it can be used as an extra warming surface. In fact, CR's experts have [cooked an entire Thanksgiving feast on a grill](#).

<https://www.realsimple.com › food-recipes › cooking-tips-techniques › thanksgiving-timeline-checklist>

### FUN List for Preparing Your Thanksgiving Meal

Checklist to keep you sane while you get ready for the big feast:

1. **Buy a turkey** — then panic because it's still frozen on Thanksgiving morning.
2. **Make a shopping list** — forget it at home, then improvise in the store like a culinary jazz musician.
3. **Assign side dishes** — watch Aunt Linda bring her “famous” Jell-O salad no one eats.
4. **Test the oven** — realize it's been storing baking sheets for the past year.
5. **Peel potatoes** — recruit “volunteers” who mysteriously disappear after one potato.
6. **Set the table** — discover you own exactly three matching forks.
7. **Plan dessert** — but somehow end up with four pumpkin pies and no whipped cream.
8. **Prepare for kitchen chaos** — because someone *will* open the oven just to “check.”
9. **Have a backup plan** — aka pizza delivery on speed dial.
10. **Smile for family photos** — even if you're holding a fire extinguisher.