



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 reheat 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.