

Chefs' secrets for your Most delicious Thanksgiving dinner!

It's the most delicious time of year! And we have the easy ways to ensure your holiday meal is the best ever!

Enjoy delicious turkey!

❖ Ensure oohs and aahs with five-spice butter!

"Spreading flavored butter on breast meat before roasting keeps it juicy and gives the skin a great shiny finish," says chef John Mitzewich (FoodWishes.com). To make his favorite flavored butter: In small bowl, combine 1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature; 1 tsp. salt; 1 Tbs. fresh ground pepper; 2 Tbs. fresh thyme, minced; 1/4 cup fresh sage, minced; 1/4 tsp. Chinese 5-spice blend; and 1 clove garlic, finely crushed. Mash with a fork until completely mixed. Spread the butter between the skin and breast meat. Don't skip the Chinese 5-spice blend, he urges. It contains ginger, cinnamon and star anise, "which give the turkey a subtle, delicious aroma!"

❖ Achieve crispy golden skin!

"Remove the turkey from its plastic wrapping and let it 'dry out' in the refrigerator, uncovered, for the whole night before roasting," suggests Iron Chef Al Guarnaschelli, author of *The Home Cook* and a frequent judge on *Food Network's Chopped*. "It'll ensure the skin gets nice and crispy!"



Make marvelous mashed potatoes!

❖ Prep faster with timesaving taters!

A great timesaver? "Peel potatoes up to three days before the big day," advises Allison Waggoner, author of *Thanksgiving: Giving Thanks at Home*. "Once they're peeled, place the potatoes in a plastic container covered with some chicken stock or water with a squeeze of lemon. When you're ready to cook, just drain them and boil as usual!"



❖ Cue your slow cooker!

Save stovetop space with Waggoner's delicious slow cooker garlic mashed potatoes: Place 5 lbs. potatoes, peeled, cut into 1 1/2" cubes; 1 cup chicken stock; 5 cloves garlic; and 1/3 cup butter in a 6- to 8-quart slow cooker. Season with 1/2 tsp. salt and 1/2 tsp. ground pepper. Mix and cover with lid. Set on high for 3 to 4 hours (stirring several times), or low for 7 to 8 hours. Remove lid and mash with a large fork. Stir in 1/2 cup cream, 1/2 cup sour cream and 1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese. Keep on low until ready to serve.



Get great gravy!

❖ Banish lumps by sprinkling in flour!

"If you're thickening gravy with flour, add a small amount at a time into your drippings," advises Waggoner. "Adding flour too quickly gives your gravy a paste-like consistency. So sprinkle in a little bit, whisk it in gently, and allow it to absorb the drippings before adding more."

❖ Fix flavor fast!

If your gravy tastes blah after cooking it, using more salt won't help, says Guarnaschelli. What will? "A splash of red wine vinegar for brightness and a dash of soy or Worcestershire sauce for flavor!" And if your gravy is too salty? Drop chunks of a raw, peeled potato into the gravy to absorb the salt; heat 10 more minutes. Remove the potato pieces and discard.



Bake perfect pie!

❖ Crisp up your crust with cookie crumbs!

"Roll out the dough for the bottom of your pie on a thin layer of finely crushed cookie crumbs," recommends Kate McDermott (ArtOfThePie.com) author of *Art of the Pie*. "Just pulse the cookies in a food processor or place them in a large zip-top bag and crush them with a rolling pin. Along with extra flavor, the crumbs will help give you a crisper crust." Her favorite crumb combos: gingersnaps with pumpkin pies, Snickerdoodles with apple pies!



❖ Upgrade your pumpkin pie with coconut milk!

"One of my favorite variations on pumpkin pie is to substitute canned light coconut milk for milk in the filling, for an extra smooth custard," reveals McDermott. And to jazz up apple pie? "Add a tablespoon of apple-flavored liquor. I like to use applejack or Calvados, a French distilled apple brandy."



—Kristina Mastrocola