

# Chef's Corner: Thanksgiving Special Roast Turkey with Oyster Stuffing

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*This recipe is a Colonial classic that weaves North Carolina's finest delicacy into the classic turkey dinner for a true tribute to our past and present!*

Thanksgiving may be our favorite culinary holiday because it infuses cross-generational and multi-cultural cuisine into a celebratory feast fit for natives and royalty alike.

This holiday is generally untainted by commercialism, and the only expectation is that all of us bring a spirit of humility, giving, and thanks to the table as we break bread in peace as did so many generations before us.

It is a time for family and friends to remember, recognize, and rejoice in all that is good in this crazy world, and I hope that the recipes and ideas presented herein help each of us kick-off the holiday season with joy and love in our respective hearts.

## Now, on to the food!

*"Moist and Delicious"* is the theme for this month's nostalgic Thanksgiving feature.

While the details focus on the turkey, stuffing, gravy, and cranberries, Frances and I offer thoughts on some of the mainstays from our annual spread - *appetizers through desserts* - which typically feed the blessed multitude!

For me, the signature item that brings the Thanksgiving spirit to the forefront is Grandpa Harry's oyster stuffing.

Harry W. Meyer was my stepfather and a proud member of the Great Generation. A 30-year Navy veteran, Harry fought in WWII, Korea, and Viet Nam and was truly a *"broth of a boy."* His signature holiday dish was the oyster stuffing, which would elevate a goose, duck, or turkey to mouth-watering heights born from a labor of love (and several martinis!).

Harry, this one's for you!



*Caught in the Act! Daughter April sneaking a sample!*



*Honoring Traditions: Fresh wild turkey harvested Thanksgiving morning at our farm in Southampton County, VA, then expertly dressed and prepared for stuffing!*

## Oyster Stuffing:

Pint (16 oz.) of shucked oysters and liquor – drain oysters and reserve the liquor! Use the liquor in the stuffing as part of the liquid, and round out with chicken or turkey stock from the giblets, neck, heart, and livers (boiled separately after being pulled from the turkey).

### *Stuffing Ingredients:*

¼ cup butter (1/2 stick)

1 package Pepperidge Farm Herb Seasoned Stuffing (14 oz.) – simple and effective! (other brands will work – this is the one we tend to use)

1 large white onion, coarsely chopped

1 or 2 cloves of garlic, crushed, then finely chopped (*optional* for us garlic lovers!)

2 celery ribs, coarsely chopped

2-½ cups of liquid. The liquid includes the reserved oyster liquor! Make up the balance of the liquid using turkey stock from the giblets or chicken broth. We like Swanson Organic Chicken Broth if we must use a commercial brand (i.e. when giblets are not available).

1 pint *fresh* oysters (16 oz.), drained and coarsely chopped (be sure to reserve the oyster liquor!)

¼ cup fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped (1 tablespoon of parsley flakes works in a pinch)

1 tablespoon fresh sage, finely chopped, or 1 teaspoon ground sage

1 tablespoon fresh thyme, finely chopped, or 1 teaspoon ground thyme

1 ½ teaspoons truffle salt or sea salt (to taste)

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

½ teaspoon ground white pepper

### *Preparing the Stuffing:*

Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat (or use bacon grease if desired). Add onion, celery and garlic; sauté, stirring occasionally, for three minutes. Cover pan and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are almost translucent, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove cover, add broth, and cook to a boil, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the skillet.

Remove the skillet from the heat.

Add spices and stuffing mix and mix lightly. Add coarsely chopped oysters, mix lightly to distribute throughout, and immediately spoon the stuffing mixture into the prepared turkey! Bake extra stuffing in a small baking dish (last 30 min) – we like to add a bit of bacon grease on top!

\*After sautéing the onion and celery, deglaze pan and add deglazing juices to gravy stock!



*Oysters & Spices Ready for the Pan!*



*Progressively add ingredients to the pan.*

**TIP:** Add the coarsely chopped oysters *last*, and immediately stuff the turkey so that the stuffing does not get too soggy before cooking – lets the bird absorb that delicious oyster liquor!

## Roast Stuffed Turkey:

On average, a 10-12-pound wild or domestic turkey is about right for this recipe. We often cook one of each provided I can successfully harvest a fall bird! We then double-up on the stuffing and cranberry recipes accordingly. Likewise, for a very large bird (e.g. 20 lbs. or more), simply double-up on the ingredients. When in doubt, more is better because the leftover stuffing will be amazing and in high demand! That was the case for the turkey pictured at right!

### *To Prepare the Turkey(s) for Stuffing:*

If using a frozen bird, make sure it is *completely* thawed before preparing!

Remove all giblets (neck, heart, liver, and gizzard) from inside the bird and add to the gravy stockpot.

Truss the drumsticks to prep for stuffing. For lean wild birds, I often drape some bacon strips across the skin and exposed stuffing since it lacks the extra fat typical of domestically raised fowl (or simply baste with butter more frequently).

Spoon stuffing into the cavity until full. Leftover stuffing can be stuffed into the fleshy throat of the bird under the skin.

### *Cooking the Stuffed Turkey:*

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Rub turkey liberally with softened butter.

Baste with juices from the roasting pan or fresh butter, and lightly season with salt and pepper during each basting. I usually baste one to two times hourly.

Cook approximately 15 minutes per pound (10 min per lb. for a wild bird). However, do not overcook – especially the wild bird! We usually take the turkey out a bit early; cover with aluminum foil; and let “rest” for up to 30 minutes before carving. It will continue to cook in this fashion without getting dry, and any juices that drain are added to the stockpot!



*Place extra stuffing in baking dishes with a tad of bacon drippings on top.*



*Wife Frances ready to baste the bird!*



*After the turkey has properly “rested,” scoop out stuffing, carve, and serve!*

Once rested, scoop out the stuffing into a serving bowl; then, skillfully slice the turkey - disjuncting the wings, drumsticks, and thighs - and serve with fresh cranberry sauce, giblet gravy, and your choice of side dishes and condiments!

## Giblet Gravy:

We always make far more gravy than we need for the dinner because it is so good with leftovers, and it freezes very well! We also like to use as many of the ingredients from the sides and de-glazed roasting pans and skillets as possible as we infuse the gravy stock with the flavors of the feast. I have found that this approach makes the gravy a perfect topping on just about any of the hot items served – from the turkey & taters to brussels and biscuits.

### *Preparing the Gravy Stock:*

How to re-purpose vegetable broth, turkey stock, and water used to deglaze roasting pan to create the rich gravy stock for straining and thickening:

\* I usually remove the turkey liver once it is cooked about medium – this the Chef's treat! I squeeze a little lemon juice on it and snack away! I let the gizzard, heart, and neck cook until soft and tender – usually takes a while and really adds a nice richness to the stock. I reserve the gizzard, chop finely, and add to the gravy as it thickens at the end for that classic giblet gravy! I often pick the cooked meat and skin from the turkey neck, chop, and add to the gravy, also! Sweet and delicious!

I feed the stock pot with peels and scraps from all veggies to start the gravy broth and add my favorite spice bouquet – bay leaf, thyme, sage, white pepper, etc. Ends and peels from celery, onions, carrots, parsnips, etc. are also utilized! Trim-out all celery, carrots, and onion for the stock pot and store dressed veggies in Ziplocs. I will occasionally add a few cubes of chicken bouillon as well. Just remember, when it comes to salty flavors, you can always add, but you can never take away, so add to taste, and know that deglazing pans and reserving steaming broths will add rich spice and flavor as well!

Additional and/or optional stock seasonings to taste include sage, thyme, onion powder, garlic powder, celery salt, white pepper, black pepper, bay leaf, and ground mustard seed. Start with a little and add only as needed.

### **Preparing the Roux**

A quality Roux is the key to making a smooth, creamy gravy, and it is very simple and straightforward to prepare!

I like to prepare the Roux slightly ahead of time so it is above room temperature, but easy to whisk smoothly into the hot gravy stock.

At its essence, Roux is flour and fat cooked together to produce a sinfully good thickener for soups, stews, sauces, and gravies.

Acceptable fats include clarified butter, margarine, bacon drippings, vegetable oil, or lard. I tend to use butter for a turkey gravy because it is easy to portion-out and has a mild, sweet flavor that goes with all classic side dishes.

Generally, an equal amount of flour and fat *by weight* produces the ideal ratio, so a good portioning scale can be handy until you get the feel for making this instinctively.

Begin by melting the fat in a skillet over medium heat. Add flour to the melted fat a little bit at a time while continually stirring with a wooden spoon or whisk. Once all flour is smoothly blended into the fat, continue to cook over low-to-medium heat until desired color is achieved.



*Chopped giblets are added near the end.*



*Deglazing roasting pan with strained stock.*



*Melting the butter....*

I recommend a blond Roux for the Thanksgiving table. To achieve the blond color, cook until the Roux becomes bubbly and continue to stir and cook until caramelization *just* begins. At that point, remove from the heat, put aside, and use when ready to thicken the strained gravy stock.

*Note:* A good Roux is characteristically stiff or pasty vice runny or pourable.



*A perfect Blond Roux!.*

### **Fresh Cranberry Sauce Condiment:**

Simple is best here! No need to overcomplicate this superb condiment and classic side for the sliced turkey entrée.

1 bag (12-oz.) Ocean Spray Fresh Cranberries (or frozen), rinsed and checked for bad berries and stems

1 cup sugar

1 cup water

Combine sugar and water in a medium saucepan. Bring to boil; add cranberries, return to boil. Reduce heat and boil gently for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cover and cool completely at room temperature. Refrigerate until serving time – may also be cooked a day or two early. Makes 2 1/4 cups. We usually double this recipe to make sure we have leftovers!



*Fresh cranberries and velvety-smooth turkey gravy are the perfect accompaniment to Fran's stuffed turkey dinner!!*

### **Classic Family Sides:** (recipes *not* included for brevity!)

Fran's Country corn pudding.

Roasted medley of regular and sweet potatoes, parsnips, carrots, celery, and onions.

Mashed potatoes with too much butter.

Steamed fresh brussels sprouts – not overdone (can also roast these)!

Collard greens with smoked ham hocks, spices, and a touch of molasses and red pepper flakes.

Fresh green bean casserole – fresh beans add great texture, but frozen or canned will do in a pinch...I like texture, so fresh is best for me!

Nanny's *famous* Mediterranean marinated bean salad (to be published in a future article!). My Mom's specialty.

Fresh baked dinner rolls and/or biscuits.



*Fran's country corn pudding – always goes quick!*

### Family Favorite Thanksgiving Appetizers & Snacks:

Southern fried oysters (kinda' primes the palate for that oyster stuffing!)

Pan-fried Bambi Bites from a choice cut of wild venison tenderloin

Greek-style venison meatballs (Keftedes) – I only use ground venison!

Spicy deviled eggs – the usual recipe with thinly sliced chili du jour!

Steamed Jumbo NC shrimp with homemade cocktail sauce & hot butter

Crab imperial-stuffed mushrooms – sometimes we stuff shrimp, too!

Mini-fried (or broiled) crab cake clusters with homemade tartar sauce.

Assorted chips, raw veggies, and dips

Buffalo chicken dip and pita chips – daughter Elizabeth's specialty.

Bacon-wrapped cheese-stuffed jalapenos – another one of Elizabeth's creations!

Marinated Cracked Green Olives with olive oil, lemon, and garlic, Greek Style (taught to me by my Uncle Lambros)



*Southern fried oysters are a can't-miss treat!*

### Fran's Favorite Dessert Menu:

Chocolate Chess Pie

From Scratch Pecan Pie

Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream

Granny Smith Apple Pie

Assorted Fruit and Sliced Cheeses

Stay tuned for next month's "*Christmas Special*" featured recipe!



*Fran's chocolate chess pie!*

*Contributed by: John and Frances Germanos with a tribute and THANK YOU to a great American and Patriot, LCDR (R) Harry W. Meyer (may he forever rest in peace).*

