

HOLIDAY MEATS—NOT JUST TURKEY!

Factsheet | HGIC 3565 | Updated: Dec 16, 2019

Turkey is the centerpiece of many holiday meals in South Carolina, but it's not the only main dish tradition. Rib roast, ham, lamb, venison and pheasant are also popular choices. Small birds like capon, duck, goose, or Cornish hen; and meat cuts like pork tenderloin or veal may be chosen for small holiday gatherings. Regardless of the choice, all of these meat entrees have one thing in common – food safety. When it comes to special holiday meals, the person doing the cooking wants a perfect and perfectly safe feast. Food safety should be a primary focus when purchasing, preparing, cooking, serving, storing, and heating up leftover meats.



Roasted duck is a great turkey alternative for small families
Anonymous, @2019, HGIC, Clemson Extension



Ham is a great meat choice for holiday festivities.
Adair P. Hoover @2019, HGIC, Clemson Extension

Preparation

The first step in preparation is to purchase good quality and safe cuts of meat and poultry. This requires careful inspection when shopping. Check beef, lamb, pork, veal, and poultry packaging for proof of inspection by the USDA or the South Carolina Meat and Poultry Inspection Service. Once your purchase is at home, refrigerate immediately. Cook or freeze fresh poultry within a day or two and fresh meats within three to five days. Observe “use-by dates” on hams sealed at the plant; for store-wrapped cooked ham portions, use within three to five days.

Wild game packaged by hunters has not been federally or state-inspected, so extra care must be taken to handle it safely. Parasites such as *Trichinella* and *Toxoplasma* may be present. Improper handling can cause bacterial contamination as well as off-flavors. You should confirm that game was dressed in the field right after shooting; chilled quickly, and kept below 40 °F until cooked or frozen. For more information about wild game, see [HGIC 3516, Safe Handling of Wild Game Meats](#).

Roasting

During the holidays people tend to spend more money for specialty meat. Sometimes these expensive meats and poultry cost more because they are exceptionally tender or high quality. Roasting is the

recommended method for cooking tender meats. To roast, meat is placed on a rack in a shallow, uncovered pan and is cooked by the indirect dry heat of an oven. To keep the meat tender and minimize shrinkage due to the evaporation of moisture, a moderately slow oven temperature of 325 °F should be used.

The USDA does not recommend cooking meat and poultry at oven temperatures lower than 325 °F, because these foods could remain in the “Danger Zone” (temperatures between 40 °F to 140 °F) too long. Bacteria which may be present on these foods multiply rapidly at these temperatures. Boned and rolled meats require more cooking time per pound than bone-in cuts because it takes longer for the heat to penetrate through the solid meat. See table below for roasting times of holiday meats.

Different meats have different internal temperatures that they must be cooked to for safety. That is why a meat thermometer is one of the most important tools for determining when the meat has reached a safe temperature and preferred doneness. Always use a food thermometer when cooking meat and poultry to determine “doneness”. Cook raw beef, lamb, pork, and veal steaks, roasts, and chops to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating. For reasons of personal preference, meat may be cooked to higher temperatures. Cook all poultry and wild game to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

Background and Cooking Tips for Holiday Meats

Beef and Veal: Overcooking beef and veal may cause them to be dry. Cook all raw beef and veal steaks, roasts, and chops to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F and allow meat to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.

Lamb: Technically, “Spring lamb” is meat from lambs slaughtered from March to the first week in October. The term comes from the time when lambs born in harsh winter weather would have little chance to survive until the next year. Today, with more protected animal husbandry conditions, enjoying “lamb” (meat from sheep about one year old) need not be confined to a particular season of the year.

Some people may view lamb as a fatty meat. However, leg and loin lamb meat has a similar fat content to lean beef and pork loin when trimmed of visible fat. The “fell” is a paper-like covering on lamb and is usually removed from steaks and chops at the retail market. Leave the fell on leg roasts to help retain shape.

Pork: Because hogs are about 50 percent leaner than they were 25 years ago, today’s pork cooks faster and can dry out when overcooked. Years ago, when pork had more fat than it does today, the meat could be overcooked and still be fairly tender and flavorful. For safety as well as tenderness and flavor, cook pork to at least 145 °F (medium-rare) and allow a 3-minute rest. Pork cooked to medium-rare doneness as measured with a meat thermometer and then allowed to rest for 3 minutes before cooking or eating may still be pink inside but will be safe.

Wild Game: To remove the “gamey” flavor, you can soak wild meat or poultry in a solution of either 1 tablespoon salt or 1 cup vinegar per quart of cold water. Use enough solution to cover the game completely and soak it overnight in the refrigerator. Discard the soaking solution before cooking. Wild game is leaner than its domestically raised counter-part. Trim any visible fat, which is where a gamey flavor can reside. Roast tender cuts of venison and game birds (if skinned) covered with oil-soaked cheesecloth or strips of bacon to prevent the meat from drying out. Set them on a rack in a shallow pan and roast in the oven at 325 °F. Whole game birds should be cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. Cook wild game meat to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

Duck & Goose: Most domestic ducks are a breed called White Peking. The term “Long Island” duck is a trade name. Domestic ducklings have a great deal of fat. While it helps them float when swimming, fat is undesirable in a cooked duck. Therefore, it is recommended to prick or score the skin of a whole duck

before cooking, so that much of the fat will render out. Although domestic geese are larger than ducks, they are cooked in the same manner. Oven cooking bags are helpful for cooking these birds, because they hold the fat for easy disposal and keep the oven spatter-free.

Capons & Cornish Hens: These specialty birds are chickens. Cornish hens are small broiler-fryers weighing 1 to 2 pounds. Capons are male chickens, which are surgically unsexed; weighing about 4 to 7 pounds, they have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Roast them as you would any chicken.

Turkey: For information on preparing turkey, please see [HGIC 3560, How To Cook Turkey](#).

Leftovers

Basic Tips: Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator; avoid placing large pots of stew or gravy in the refrigerator to cool since it will likely take until the next day for this amount of food to cool. For foods like ham, lamb, and brisket, carve the remaining meat off the bone and store in small shallow containers in the refrigerator and use within three to four days. For frozen storage, wrap meat in heavy foil or freezer wrap or place in a freezer container. For optimum taste, use meat within two to three months. Do not taste food that looks or smells strange. **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

Holiday Meat Roasting Chart

Holiday Meat Roasting Chart

Type of Meat	Oven °F	Approximate Timing	Minimum Internal Temperature & Rest Time
Beef, Fresh			
Beef, rib roast, bone-in; 4–8 lbs.	325	23–30 Minutes/lb.	145 °F and allow to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.
Beef, rib roast, boneless; 4 lbs.	325	39–43 Minutes/lb.	
Beef, eye round roast; 2–3 lbs.	325	20–22 Minutes/lb.	
Beef, tenderloin roast, whole; 4–6 lbs.	425	45–60 Minutes total	
Beef, tenderloin roast, half; 2–3 lbs.	425	35–45 Minutes total	
Lamb			
Lamb, leg, bone-in; 5–9 lbs.	325	20–26 Minutes/lb.	145 °F and allow to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.
Lamb, leg, boneless; 4–lbs.			
Lamb, crown roast; 5 lbs.	375	20–30 Minutes/lb.	
Pork, Fresh			
Pork loin roast, bones-in; 3–5 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb.	145 °F and allow to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.

Pork loin roast boneless; 2–4 lbs.	325	23–33 Minutes/lb.	
Pork, crown roast; 6–10 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb.	
Pork, tenderloin; ½–1½ lbs.	425	20–30 Minutes total	
Pork, Cured			
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; whole, 14–16 lbs.	325	18–20 Minutes/lb.	145 °F and allow to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.
Ham, cook-before-eating, bone-in; half, 7–8 lbs.	325	22–25 Minutes/lb.	
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; whole, 14–16 lbs.	325	15–18 Minutes/lb.	140 °F
Ham, fully cooked, bone-in; half, 7–8 lbs.	325	18–25 Minutes/lb.	
Ham, fully cooked, boneless; 3–4 lbs.	325	27–33 Minutes/lb.	
Veal			
Veal, boneless roast, rump or shoulder; 2–3 lbs.	325	25–30 Minutes/lb.	145 °F and allow to rest for 3 minutes before carving or eating.
Veal, bone-in roast, loin; 3–4 lbs.	325	30–34 Minutes/lb.	
Game			
Venison, round, rump, loin, rib roast; 3–4 lbs.	325	20–25 Minutes/lb.	165 °F
Duck, wild, whole	350	18–20 Minutes/lb.	
Goose, wild, whole	325	20–25 Minutes/lb.	
Pheasant, young, whole; 2 lbs.	350	30 Minutes/lb.	
Quail, whole	425	20 Minutes total	
Poultry*			
Capon, whole; 4–8 lbs.	375	20–30 Minutes/lb.	165 °F
Cornish hens, whole; 18–24 ounces	350	50–60 Minutes total	
Duck, domestic, whole	375	20 Minutes/lb.	
Goose, domestic, whole	325	20–25	

	Minutes/lb.	
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*Times are for unstuffed poultry. Add 15-30 minutes for stuffed birds. The internal temperature should reach 165°F in the center of the stuffing.

Sources:

1. USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. *Roasting Those “Other” Holiday Meats*. May 2011.
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2. U.S. FDA. (2009.) *FDA Food Code*.
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/FoodCode/default.htm>
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Original Author(s)

Pamela Schmutz, Former Retired HGIC Food Safety Specialist, Clemson University
E.H. Hoyle, PhD, Retired Extension Food Safety Specialist, Clemson University

Revisions by:

Adair Hoover, HGIC Food Safety Agent, Clemson Extension, Clemson University

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Clemson Cooperative Extension | 103 Barre Hall Clemson, SC 29634
864-986-4310 | HGIC@clemson.edu