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Whole Turkey - Apple Brine

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Summary

- Buy a natural, 12-14 pound turkey. Don't use a self-basted turkey when brining.
- Brine for 24 hours, then air-dry overnight in the refrigerator.
- Smoke at 325-350°F until 160-165°F in the breast, 170-175°F in the thigh, approximately 2-1/2 to 3 hours.
- Let rest for 30 minutes before carving. Alternatively, wrap tightly in several layers of foil, place breast-side down in a dry cooler, and hold for 90-120 minutes before carving.
- Collect the pan drippings for making gravy.



Apple-brined turkey, Thanksgiving 2001

This is one of the most popular turkey brining recipes among members of [The Virtual Weber Bulletin Board](#). It is adapted from a recipe originally published in Weber's *Grill Out Times* newsletter in the late 1990s.

Here's how I brined and cooked a whole turkey using this recipe on October 22-23, 2005. I hope you enjoy it!

As always...click on any of the pictures to view a larger image.



Select And Prepare The Turkey

This is a 12.80 pound Albertsons Natural Turkey, just your basic, frozen supermarket turkey.



When buying a turkey for brining, choose a natural turkey, not a self-basted bird that's been injected with a solution of salt and other flavorings. Look for the words "natural", "no additives", and "minimally processed" on the label. See [Turkey Selection & Preparation](#) for more details.



Choose a 12-14 pound turkey and thaw according to the package directions. Remove and discard any leg restraint, then remove the giblets from the neck cavity and the neck from the body cavity. Trim away large areas of fat or excess skin around the body cavity, and cut off the tail (if attached). Rinse thoroughly inside and out, and pat dry with paper towels.



The turkey is now ready for brining.



Brine The Turkey

In preparation for brining:

- Find a non-reactive container large enough to hold the turkey.
- Making sure the container will fit in your refrigerator.



See [All About Brining](#) and [Food Grade Plastic Containers For Brining](#) for information about selecting an appropriate container, including alternatives like ice chests or turkey roasting bags inside non-food safe containers. These pictures show a plastic barbecue sauce bucket that I got for free from a local barbecue joint.

Here's the recipe for the apple brine:

Apple Brine For Turkey

2 quarts apple juice
 1 pound brown sugar (light or dark)
 1 cup Diamond Crystal Kosher Salt
 3 quarts cold water
 3 oranges, quartered
 4 ounces fresh ginger, unpeeled and thinly sliced
 15 whole cloves
 6 bay leaves
 6 large garlic cloves, peeled and crushed

Substitute 3/4 cup Morton Kosher Salt or 1/2 cup table salt for Diamond Crystal.

Combine apple juice, brown sugar, and salt in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring to dissolve. Boil for one minute, remove from heat, let mixture come to room temperature, then refrigerate to 40°F.

In a large non-reactive container, combine the apple juice mixture with the remaining ingredients. When adding the oranges, squeeze each piece to release the juice into the container, then drop in the peel.

Put the turkey in the brine breast side down (Picture 1). Place a heavy plate or bowl on top to keep the bird submerged, if necessary (Picture 2).

Brine the turkey for 24 hours. You may wish to stir the solution 2-3 times during the brining process. I'm not sure if this is necessary or if it actually does anything, but I like to do it anyway.

Since brining does not preserve meat, **the turkey and the brine solution must be kept below 40°F throughout the entire brining process.**



Air-Dry The Turkey

After brining, rinse the turkey thoroughly inside and out, and pat dry with paper towels.



Place on a rack over a rimmed baking sheet and allow to air-dry overnight (8-12 hours) in the refrigerator. This helps create crispy skin during cooking.

Picture 1 shows the turkey air-drying in the refrigerator. Picture 2 shows how it looked after 12 hours in the fridge.

Fire The WSM

Fire-up the cooker using the [Standard Method](#)--one full Weber chimney of hot Kingsford charcoal briquettes in the charcoal bowl, followed by another full chimney of unlit Kingsford, allowing all coals to become fully lit before cooking.



Foil The Water Pan

Cover the inside and outside of the water pan with wide, heavy duty aluminum foil. Place the pan inside the cooker, but leave it empty.

No Rub Required

Remove the turkey from the refrigerator at the same time you start firing-up the cooker. Let it sit at room temperature until ready to go into the cooker.

For better presentation, tie the ends of the drumsticks together using kitchen twine so they don't splay out into a funny shape during cooking. There's no need for any elaborate trussing. Also, fold the wing tips under the turkey.

Apply a very thin coat of vegetable oil or melted, unsalted butter to the turkey skin.

There is no barbecue seasoning or rub applied to the turkey as part of this recipe.



Smoke The Turkey

When all the coals are covered with gray ash, place 2-3 medium-sized chunks of dry cherry wood or other mild smoke wood on the coals. I used 1 chunk of cherry and 1 chunk of apple (Picture 1).



Assemble the cooker and place the turkey breast-side up on the top grate (Picture 2). Set the three bottom vents to 50% open. Open the top vent fully and leave it that way throughout the entire cook.



Adjust the bottom vents to maintain a temperature of 325-350°F measured at the lid. Cook the turkey until it measures 160-165°F in the breast.

There's no need to baste or rotate the turkey during the cooking process.

Here's how the cooker temperatures and vent settings went during my

cook:

Time	Lid Temp	Meat Temp	Vent 1 %	Vent 2 %	Vent 3 %
8:00am	-	46	50	50	50
8:30am	412	82	50	50	50
8:45am	360	-	50	50	50
9:00am	350	116	50	50	50
9:30am	334	138	100	100	50
10:00am	342	156	100	100	100
10:11am	352	163	100	100	100

Picture 3 shows how the turkey looked after one hour of cooking.



Rest Then Carve The Turkey

Remove the turkey from the cooker and let rest for 20-30 minutes before carving (Picture 1). Do not cover with foil, as this will cause the skin to go soft.



Alternatively, wrap the turkey tightly in several layers of wide, heavy duty aluminum foil, place breast-side down in a dry cooler, and hold for 90-120 minutes before carving (Picture 2).



After the rest, carve the turkey to your liking. See the Turkey Selection & Preparation article for [carving tips](#).

I like to remove the breast as a single piece and then cut into slices across the grain using an electric knife (Picture 3).



Collecting Pan Drippings For Gravy

There are three common ways to collect pan drippings when smoking a turkey:



1. Cook the turkey in a shallow, disposable foil pan.
2. Cook the turkey on the top cooking grate. Place an empty foil pan on the bottom grate to catch the drippings.
3. Cook the turkey on the top cooking grate. Line the water pan with wide, heavy duty aluminum foil, but suspend the foil 1-1/2" above the bottom of the pan so it does not touch (Picture 1). This prevents the drippings from burning.

Assuming you don't over smoke the turkey, the drippings will be perfect for making gravy—in fact, they're already seasoned by any rub applied to the turkey.

As you remove the turkey from the cooker, pour any accumulated juices inside the body cavity into the pan. You can also use the juices left in the bottom of a rimmed baking pan after letting the turkey rest before carving.

It's not uncommon to end up with about 1-1/2 cups of drippings (Picture 2).

If you don't have any drippings, make the delicious [turkey giblet gravy](#) described on The Virtual Weber Bulletin Board using the giblets, aromatic vegetables, chicken stock, white wine, and seasonings.

Butterball Turkey Tips

If you have questions about anything having to do with turkey, visit the [Butterball Web site](#). The site features turkey preparation info, grilling tips, carving techniques, recipes, and a frequently asked questions page.

Another great resource is the Butterball Turkey Talk-Line (800-BUTTERBALL) which is staffed by Butterball specialists during the months of November and December.

Other Turkey Links

- [Whole Turkey - Self-Basting](#)
- [Whole Turkey - Basic Brine](#)
- [Whole Turkey - Honey Brine](#)
- [Whole Turkey - Salted](#)
- [Turkey Breast - Bone-In](#)
- [Turkey Breast - Boneless & Skinless](#)

- [Turkey Carving Video on YouTube](#)
- [Turkey Selection & Preparation](#)

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