

# Thaw your holiday turkey the safe way



**gwinnett**county  
**Cooperative Extension  
Education Resource**

The USDA recommends three ways to defrost turkeys; in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave. Never defrost a turkey on the counter!

## Refrigerator thawing:

For every 5 pounds of turkey, allow approximately 24 hours of thawing time in a refrigerator set at 40 F. After thawing, keep turkey refrigerated for only one to two days. Use the following chart:

Size of turkey	Thawing time in the refrigerator
8 to 12 pounds	1 to 2 days
12 to 16 pounds	2 to 3 days
16 to 20 pounds	3 to 4 days
20 to 24 pounds	4 to 5 days

## Cold water thawing:

If you forget to thaw the turkey or don't have room in the refrigerator for thawing, don't panic. You can submerge the bird or cut-up parts in cold water in its airtight packaging or in a leak-proof bag. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. Change the water every 30 minutes to be sure it stays cold. The following times are suggested for thawing in water:

Size of turkey	Hours to defrost
8 to 12 pounds	4 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	10 to 12 hours

Turkeys thawed by the cold water method should be cooked immediately.

## Microwave thawing:

Read and follow the oven manufacturer's instructions. Check the instructions for the size turkey that will fit in your oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing.

Turkey thawed by this method should be cooked immediately.

For more information about thawing, cooking, and storing your turkey leftovers, please contact Ines Beltran at the Gwinnett Cooperative Extension Service at [inesb@uga.edu](mailto:inesb@uga.edu) or at 678.377.4010.

