

Here to help

ANGELA NILSEN asks celebrity chefs and culinary experts to share their festive kitchen know-how

Your
Christmas
questions
answered

Q I find it rather daunting to carve the turkey at the table with everyone watching – can you suggest an easier alternative?

Angela Nilsen says: A more relaxed approach, which takes away the pressure of having to perform in front of family and friends, is to carve the turkey in the kitchen. Heat up a large platter so the turkey doesn't get cold, then carve, slicing the breast meat into chunky slices.

Arrange these onto the heated platter along with the drumsticks and thighs, plus any extra trimmings, such as crispy bacon and stuffing. To keep the meat extra warm, pour over some piping hot gravy, then confidently carry it to the table and let everyone help themselves.

Send your query to: advice@bbcgoodfoodme.com



Turkey know-how

Follow Good Food's guide for your best-ever roast turkey

What size to buy

2.25kg/5lb	serves 4-6
3.6kg/8lb	serves 6-8
4.5-5.6kg/10-12lb	serves 10-12
9kg/20lb	serves 12-15

5kg-7.25kg	= 2-2½ hrs
7.5-10kg	= 2½-3 hrs
12.5kg	= 4½-5½ hrs

These timings are approximate, so test as usual for doneness, then leave to rest for at least 15 mins before carving.

Thawing your turkey

WEIGHT	THAW	THAW
	IN FRIDGE	IN WATER
2.25kg/5lb	55 hrs	9-14 hrs
3.6kg/8lb	60 hrs	14-17 hrs
4.5-5.6kg/10-12lb	70 hrs	21-26 hrs
9kg/20lb	80 hrs	30-35 hrs

Carving your turkey

This is much easier if you leave it to rest (wrapped loosely in foil) for 15-30 mins.



• **Remove legs** Cut through the skin between leg and body. Force the knife between the end of the thigh bone and the body; twist leg off. Do the same with the wings.



• **Separate drumstick and thigh** Slice between the drumstick and thigh until the knife hits the joint. Twist the knife through the joint to separate the drumstick and thigh.



• **Begin carving the breast** Hold the turkey firmly on the board with a carving fork. Make a horizontal cut into the breast above the wing, cutting through the bone.



• **Complete carving** Carve the breast meat in long downward slices (or do chunkier slices) following the curves of the bird's body. Go as far as the bone. After serving, carve any leftover meat, cool quickly and wrap well. It will keep in the fridge for up to 3 days.

Roasting your turkey

For an accurate timing, always weigh your turkey after it has been stuffed. If it's very large you may need to use bathroom scales. Allow 40 mins per kg (20 mins per lb) at 190C/fan 170C/gas 5. To test that it's done, make sure the juices run clear. If not, return to the oven for another 20 mins, then test again.

Cooking your turkey in an Aga

You can either 'slow-roast' your turkey in the simmering oven, which usually involves cooking it overnight, or the more conventional way is to roast it in the roasting oven – this is the method recommended by Aga expert Amy Willcock, author of *The Aga Bible* (£25, Ebury Press). 'An Aga can accommodate a turkey that weighs up to 12.5kg/27lb. Put the prepared turkey into a roasting tin and place it in the roasting oven on the last set of runners, or on the floor of the oven if the tin won't fit. After 1 hr, or when the turkey is brown, cover it loosely with foil, then continue roasting according to the timings below.'

Q How long will a decorated Christmas cake keep, and how should I store it?

Jane Asher of Jane Asher Party Cakes, London,

says: I like to leave my cake un-iced up until a week or so before Christmas, so that I can keep 'feeding' it with brandy. You can decorate it earlier than that, but I recommend decorating the cake no earlier than a month before needed, as the longer the icing is left, the harder it becomes. If done months ahead, the marzipan starts to break down and discolour the icing. You can always build up your decorations in advance and store them separately on a small, iced cake card, which can be placed on top of the cake at the last minute, as can any fresh leaves.

Successful storage of a decorated cake depends on it being iced correctly. If you are using roll-out icing, then you can marzipan and ice the cake on the same day, but royal-iced cakes have to be marzipanned a good 24-48 hours ahead to allow the marzipan to dry out and prevent surface oils leaching into the icing. Soft-peak royal icing can then be applied once the marzipan is dry.

If the cake is iced or marzipanned all over, store it in a cake box or tin in a cool room. If the sides are bare, it needs to be wrapped loosely in greaseproof paper and cling film first. Never store an iced cake in the fridge or in a plastic food box – this can make the icing sweat and run.



Q I want to serve something different with my Christmas pudding. What do you suggest?

Lesley Waters, BBC chef, says: I often use cardamom sugar to make a quick ice cream that I can freeze for up to a month ahead to serve with my traditional pud.

For the cardamom sugar, crush a small handful of cardamom seeds and leave to infuse in a jar with 450g caster sugar for a couple of days. For the ice cream, which serves 4-6, bring 300ml milk just to the boil in a pan, then beat 4 egg yolks in a bowl with 100g cardamom sugar. Carry on beating as you pour the milk into the egg mix. Return this to the pan and stir over a low heat (don't let it boil) until the custard forms a thin film over the back of a wooden spoon. Cool the mixture, then add 300ml double cream. Transfer to an ice-cream machine and follow manufacturer's instructions for churning.



How to cover a pudding basin



- Put a small circle of greaseproof paper in the bottom of the basin so the pud doesn't stick, spoon in the mixture and level the top. Cover with a circle of buttered greaseproof

paper, then take a large sheet of greaseproof covered with the same size sheet of foil. Fold a 3cm pleat down the centre and lay this on top.



- Tie firmly with string, so the string lies just under the rim, making a handle from the string. Trim the ends of the paper and tuck the foil neatly under itself.



- Use the string handle to lower in and lift the basin from the steamer or pan.

The perfect Christmas cheeseboard

Stuart Gates, spokesman for Harrods' cheese counter, recommends offering four or five cheeses of contrasting flavours, looks and textures.

You want a couple of classics – a firm farmhouse cheddar and creamy Stilton – along with more unusual pieces. Try a Waterloo, with its dappled rind and oozy, buttermilk-yellow inside; a Scottish Strathdon blue (both pictured); a lemony-tasting cow's milk Welsh Caws Cenarth Caerphilly; Gubbeen, a smooth Irish cheese rather like a firm Edam; and a mild, tangy Yorkshire Swaledale Ewe. To accompany them, grapes and celery are still the most popular but, for something different, try Spanish quince paste or 'membrillo'.

