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Thanksgiving Planner

Early November:

- Choose a menu.
- If you're ordering a fresh turkey, do it now; if you're buying a frozen turkey, you still have time, but don't wait until the last minute. Remember: It's best to allow four to five days for it to thaw.
- Floral centerpieces finish off a well-set table. Florists are busy this time of year, so order flowers now.

4 Days before Thanksgiving:

- Compose a shopping list, and purchase all nonperishables. Wait until the day before Thanksgiving to buy salad greens, fresh bread, or seafood.
- If you're baking pies for dessert, make the dough for the crust, roll it out, lay it into pie plates, and freeze.
- Start defrosting the frozen turkey in the coldest part of the refrigerator. Plan ahead to allow a full day for every 4 pounds of turkey being thawed.

2 Days before Thanksgiving:

- Homemade stuffing often calls for stale bread; cut and cube the bread now, and set the cubes out in a single layer on a baking sheet.
- If using cloth napkins or tablecloths, iron them now.
- Make the cranberry sauce; a couple of days in the refrigerator will give the flavors time to develop.
- Prepare the serving pieces, plates, flatware, glasses, etc.

1 Day before Thanksgiving:

- Defrost pie dough; assemble and bake pies.
- Make the giblet stock for the gravy.
- Make the vegetables and side dishes that require baking, such as casseroles, and reheat them tomorrow; or assemble them today, and cook them right before dinner.
- Peel the potatoes, and then refrigerate them in a pot of cold water.
- Pick up the fresh turkey from the market.
- Prepare the stuffing, but leave out any raw eggs until you stuff the bird.
- Set the table tonight or first thing in the morning.

Thanksgiving Day:

- 9:30 a.m.:
Remove the turkey from the refrigerator, and allow it to sit for 1 hour at room temperature.
- 11:15 a.m.:
Preheat the oven, and stuff the turkey.
- 11:30 a.m.:
Put the turkey in the oven, basting it every half hour.
- Noon:
Chill the white wine.
- 1 p.m.:
Make the mashed potatoes. Closer to dinnertime, place them in a heat-proof bowl and set them at the back of the stove over simmering water.
- 3 p.m.:
Whip the cream for the pie; prepare the coffee, but do not brew it until about 20 minutes before it will be served.
- 4 p.m.:
Check the temperature of the turkey at the thigh, which is the thickest part. If the thermometer reads 165 degrees, remove the turkey from the oven. If not, check the temperature every 15 minutes until the bird is done.

- 4:15 p.m.:**
The turkey will need to sit for 30 minutes prior to carving. Take advantage of the break to make the gravy and any last-minute vegetables. Remove stuffing from bird; transfer to a baking pan. Bake until stuffing reaches 165 degrees.

- 4:30 to 5 p.m.:**
Call everyone to the table. Start the coffee maker just before sitting down.