

How to Carve a Turkey



1. Let Your Turkey Rest for 30 Minutes

“Resting your turkey” is an important step after roasting. After cooking your turkey, let it rest for at least 30 minutes before carving.

Resting your turkey does two important things: It gives the juices in the meat a chance to settle so they don't go spilling across your cutting board when you start carving. This helps prevent dry meat. It also allows time for the bird to cool so it's easier for you to handle.

*Chef Bill's tip: It's best to use a carving board with wells around the edge to catch any moisture.

2. Use a Sharp Chef's Knife

Some folks suggest using a carving knife, but if you've cooked your turkey properly, the joints are going to come apart pretty easily, so your chef's knife should be more than adequate to do the job.

Make sure that whatever knife you use is sharp. When carving a turkey, you want to be able to slice through the skin without shredding it. The goal is to ensure that each slice of meat has its own skin still attached, and this requires a sharp knife.

3. Remove the Legs

Grab your knife and pick a leg. Gently slice through the skin between the leg joint and the body while simultaneously pulling the leg away from the carcass. As you pull, you'll see the natural seam between the leg and the body open up. That seam will guide your knife right around the thigh bone until it pops right out. Note that you're not cutting through the joint, you're just popping it out and using your knife to cut through the skin and connective tissue. Repeat with the other leg and set the legs aside.

Note that the breasts are going to take up a lot of space on your platter, so you'll want to platter them first and then arrange the drumsticks and dark meat around them.

4. Remove the Wishbone

You can carve the breasts without removing the wishbone, but then you won't be able to make a wish. (*Chef Bill's Tip: kids love making a wish on the wishbone

To remove the wishbone, turn the bird so the neck is facing you. Cut an upside-down V in the flap of skin covering the neck cavity, then reach in with your fingers and pull out the wishbone. It'll be situated in the same position as your upside-down V.

5. Remove and Carve the Breasts

Locate the breastbone running down the middle of the carcass. It's also called a "keel bone" because it's shaped like the keel of a boat. Slice through the skin just to one side of the keel bone and continue slicing downward, cutting close to the breastbone while pulling the entire breast away with your other hand.

The breast is a massive piece of meat that extends all the way down to the wing joint. Keep cutting and pulling away until you've removed the whole breast with the skin still intact.

Turn the breast skin-side up on your cutting board and slice it against the grain, on a bias, about half an inch thick. Shingle the slices on your cutting board in an appealing manner. Repeat with the other breast.

Note: When we refer to the "grain" of a piece of meat or poultry, we're talking about the long strands of muscle fibers that run this way and that throughout the meat. Slicing against (or across) these strands shortens the muscle fibers, making them more tender and easier to chew

6. Separate the Drumsticks from the Thighs

To separate the drumsticks from the thighs, turn the leg pieces over on your cutting board so that the skin side is down and you're looking directly at the meaty part of the joint. Now run your knife along the natural seam that separates the two joints, and they'll come right apart. Transfer the drumstick to your serving platter. Repeat with the other leg.

7. Debone and Carve the Thighs

Position the thigh skin-side down on the cutting board. Using the tip of your knife, cut away the meat along one side of the thigh bone, then roll the bone the other way and cut along the other side. You should now be able to remove the thigh bone (set aside for making stock) while leaving the thigh muscle intact and the skin still attached. Slice the thigh meat, against the grain and on a bias, about half an inch thick. Arrange the slices on your platter and repeat with the other thigh.

8. Remove the Wings and Separate Them

The wings are saved for last because they've been helping to stabilize the carcass on the cutting board. You can probably just pull them off, but use your knife to cut around any skin or meat. The wing consists of three sections: the pointy wing tip—the flat or "wingette"—and the "drumette," so called because it looks like a miniature drumstick. You can remove the wing tip (save it for making stock), then separate the drumette from the wingette and arrange them on your platter. Repeat with the other wing.

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VOILA! You've just carved a turkey. Your serving platter is now laid out to perfection, ready to display on your table and devoured by your hungry family and friends.

*Chef Bill's tip: Don't carve the bird at the table in front of guests and friends. It's best to do it at the counter. Also, your guests really don't need to wait at the table for the time it takes to carve the bird, even if you're a master at it.

