



ROBERT KIRBY

There's still time to snag a good gobbler

Robert Kirby is on vacation. This column is a reprint.

Picking out a Thanksgiving turkey follows the same logic as choosing a Halloween pumpkin, namely the longer you wait, the worse your choices will be.

The night before Halloween, all the cool pumpkins shaped like a particular politician's head, or an unattractive body part, are usually long gone. You have to settle for nice symmetrical ones.

Although time is running out, it is still possible to find a good turkey. By this, I mean a turkey that is both memorable and safe. You never want to remember a turkey because it put you in the emergency room.

No one knows exactly how turkey came to be the traditional Thanksgiving entree. Legend has it that starving Pilgrims, tired of eating barnacles, traded for a turkey from some American Indians, who've regretted it ever since.

Basically, there are three types of turkeys to choose from: live, frozen and imaginary.

Forget live turkeys. The bother involved in finding and preparing an animal that is two-parts feet and three-parts mattress, but still smarter than the average human, is more complicated than we have room for here.

The same goes for imaginary turkey, allegedly found in stuff like processed lunchmeats, TV dinners and military rations. If it ever was turkey, it still requires a lot of fooling yourself to believe that it's not linoleum.

This leaves the most common turkey, specifically frozen. Most Americans think this is the natural state of a turkey. I was 16 before I found out that the original equipment included a head and feet.

The natural habitat of frozen turkeys is in the freezer section of your local grocery store. You can sometimes find frozen turkeys on the side of the road, but try not to.

Frozen turkeys all look alike. Part of this is because they are covered with plastic and frozen to the consistency of a bank vault. Still, it is possible to choose a good one.

Turkeys come in two sizes: too small and too big.

Too small and there won't be enough to feed everyone. Too big and you will be serving turkey leftovers to an increasingly irate family until Presidents Day.

NOTE: This is just one of the many ways where the wrong turkey can land you in the emergency room. Other turkey dangers include underdone turkey, exploding turkeys and C-ration turkey loaf.

Once you determine the right size, use your knuckles and rap briskly on the turkey to determine freshness. A good turkey should make a sound like rapping on Hoover Dam. You don't want a soft turkey, as they rapidly become biological threats.

Take the turkey home and decide how you want to cook it. While it is possible to cook a completely frozen turkey, most people do not have access to a nuclear reactor.

It's usually best to thaw the turkey first. Do NOT soak it overnight in warm water. This increases the possibility of salmonella poisoning or even rabies. Instead, hook it to a welder for about an hour.

To cook the turkey, put it in the oven at 350 degrees. About 400 minutes per pound should do it.

If this sounds like a lot of bother, do not come to my house. We're having pig.

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