
COUNTDOWN TO THANKSGIVING CHECKLIST

AT LEAST 2 WEEKS PRIOR

- I'm assuming you've already issued invitations to your guests by this point in time. Now you need to go through your guest list and make sure that everyone has RSVP'd. If you haven't heard back from any of them, reach out and get a firm answer so you can move forward with your plans.
- Plan your menu. If you are having others bring dishes as well, be sure to coordinate with them so you know where you have gaps to fill in. Consider your oven and stovetop space. Do you need to do some make ahead items? Do you need to make use of a slow cooker (or more than one – I have two but you could borrow from others)? Be sure to talk with your guests who are bringing foods about stovetop and oven availability too!
- Gather all recipes you need based on the menu you've created.
- Create a shopping list based on your menu and recipes.
- Check the sales for any of the ingredients you need for your menu. Things like pumpkin, cranberries, and other seasonal items often go on sale around this time. If they are on sale, purchase any non-perishables and items that can go into the freezer.
- Do you need to order a turkey and/or a ham (or goose or duck or whatever you have planned for the main dish? If you haven't already done so, take care of this right away!
- Now is a good time to start making room in your freezer as needed. Make plans to incorporate items from your freezer into your meals over the next two weeks to free up space for your Thanksgiving supplies.

AT LEAST ONE WEEK PRIOR

- Plan out where everyone will sit. Do you have enough tables and chairs? If not, see if any of your guests have folding tables/chairs that they could bring along to make up the difference.
- Look over your meal plan and figure out what you will serve each dish in. Do you have enough platters, bowls, serving utensils? If not, try to borrow some or look into purchasing new ones (or check your local thrift store).
- Think about the leftovers too! It's a great idea to have some containers on hand to send leftovers home with your guests. I like to use disposable ones from the dollar store or really inexpensive ones there or from the thrift store that my guests can take home and reuse. I don't like to burden anyone with having to return the dishes to me. You could look for something themed or especially pretty that will serve as a "party favour" as well.
- Check your dishes, flatware, glassware, and table linens as well. Do you have enough to accommodate all of your guests? One year I was having people over for a holiday dinner and suddenly realized we didn't have enough wine glasses to accommodate that big a crowd. A quick trip to the dollar store and we were good to go!.
- Plan your centerpiece(s), table favours, and place cards as well. Remember that you may be serving a lot of food – will there be room on the table for it all AND space for a centerpiece? Maybe you want to have a separate table for the food and everyone can serve themselves buffet style. Or perhaps you'd like to decorate your mantel instead of the table.

This is a good time to enlist the help of your kids – get them involved in making some fun place cards (handprint turkeys anyone?) and other decorations for you!

- Are you making any dishes that freeze well? Get them out of the way now! You'll be happy you did when the big day rolls around.
- Have you planned out your beverages? Are you providing a bar for your guests? Does it need to be restocked? If not, what will you have on hand instead? I like to plan out beverage glasses (2 per person – some may want water with dinner) and wine glasses for each person and then I have a supply of disposable cups on hand in case we need extras beyond that.
- Are you doing a kids' table? Let's make it fun and some place the kids want to be instead of a punishment! Perhaps cover it with butcher paper and put out crayons so they can draw and play games. Maybe put a kids' activity book (one you print off and put together yourself? Get started on that!) at each place. Kids often get relegated to eating and drinking from the plastic ware because we're concerned about them breaking our "good stuff" but maybe go out and purchase items they will think look "fancy" but really are cheap buys from the dollar or thrift store. If they're going to be eating and drinking from plastic, how about making it ones to represent each of their favourite super heroes or Disney characters?
- Start making ice. Even if you have an icemaker, if you are hosting a large crowd, it might not be able to keep up with the demand on Thanksgiving. So start making and stocking the freezer with extra bags of ice now and you'll be prepared.
- Have you figured out what you and the kids will wear? Now's the time to plan that out and make sure that the items are clean (and ironed if needed). While you're at it, toss your table linens into the laundry and get them washed and ironed too. I hang my tablecloth from a hanger so it doesn't get wrinkled again.

A FEW DAYS PRIOR

- My serving dishes are often ones that haven't been used in a while so they're dusty and in need of a good washing. Take care of this now! Once clean, I place a slip of paper on them with the name of the food to be served on them so that on the big day, I can enlist someone's help in the kitchen and they'll know just what food goes with what dish. It's a good reminder for me too! (I place the dishes inside bags to keep them clean until Thanksgiving along with that slip of paper and the serving utensil to go with each).
- Do you need to thaw your turkey and/or ham? They need to go into the fridge now so they can start defrosting.
- Buy the perishable items you will need for your menu.
- Fill your salt and pepper shakers and your butter dish.
- Sharpen your carving knives.
- If you are using real silver flatware, now is a good time to get that polished.
- Have you made plans for your pets? Perhaps yours are perfectly well-behaved and delightful with guests. Mine? Not so much. My dog will bark and jump all over them when they try to enter the house so my plan includes creating a nice spot for her in my room with her bed and toys so I can put her in there when the guests are expected to arrive. Once here, I can bring her out and she will be much calmer with them. With the cats, the one tends to be skittish around strangers (and if she hasn't seen you in over 24 hours, you are a stranger) and the other will try to steal all the food while I'm preparing it. So I set them up in the basement with beds, toys, food, water, and litterboxes and put them down there with the door shut. They're much happier away from all the excitement anyway.

- Need stale bread for the stuffing? Cube it and lay it out to dry now so it's ready for your meal.

THE DAY BEFORE

- I get as much done as I can ahead of time. If we didn't have a dog and two cats, I'd even set the table the night before but this isn't practical for me. I do make sure that my dishes are clean and the glassware is spotless. I count out my flatware and double check to make sure I have enough of that cleaned as well. If these are items you would use on a regular basis (as opposed to the "good" china for example), I find it helpful to put them away where your family won't reach for them so they stay ready. If you don't have enough dishes to do that, either use disposables the night before or just make sure to run that dishwasher one last time.
- Speaking of the dishwasher, I like to get all dishes cleaned and put away so the dishwasher is empty and ready to be filled again as I start preparing the final stages of Thanksgiving dinner. It's good to have liquid dish soap and other hand washing supplies on hand too as if it's anything like my house, we will have to do some handwashing as well as running the dishwasher on the big day. Don't forget dish cloths or sponges and tea towels. It's also a good idea to have some aprons around for your guests to protect their clothing while helping you in the kitchen.
- Put any last minute finishing touches on your centerpiece(s) and other décor. Pick up fresh flowers if needed.
- I plan for several make ahead dishes like make ahead mashed potatoes. This is the day I get them done so I have more time to spend with my guests tomorrow. This is also the day I prepare our desserts. This helps free up space in the oven. You can also make your giblet broth now and assemble your stuffing (other than the eggs – leave those until tomorrow). Clean, peel and cut up vegetables.
- Chill beverages.
- I usually take my shower the night before as well. This frees me up in the morning to jump right into dinner preparation. My hair takes quite a long time to dry even with the use of a blow dryer so this gives it time to dry well so in the morning, I can set it with hot rollers. Consider how you will be doing your hair and whether showering the night before would help free up some time for you. Also consider giving the kids their baths the night before so that doesn't have to be tackled the next day.
- Put together a plan of action for tomorrow. Make out your to do list and consider what order the items need to be done in. Also think about whom you could delegate some of these jobs to and put their names down next to each item (or just write "helper" next to it if it's something anyone could do". Now you're ready for that, "is there anything I can help with?" question. Don't turn those offers of help down! Take them up on it and refer them to your list. Remember to plan enough time to allow the turkey to sit at room temperature before stuffing and cooking for an hour before putting in the oven and to rest for half an hour after cooking before carving tomorrow. If you plan to make coffee in a coffee maker, get it completely set up so that as you sit down to dinner, you can turn it on and have it freshly brewed for dessert time. You can also set up a teapot or two with some teabags and then add the hot water shortly before you're ready to serve it. Make sure your sugar bowl is stocked and fill your cream pitcher. If providing honey, lemons or other accompaniments get those ready too.

- Do you need to do any child proofing around the house? Perhaps there are fragile items that you would like to put away for the day just to be on the safe side. If there are any nursing moms coming, it's always nice to plan for a quiet spot for them to feed their babies (not that it's not ok to just feed them wherever they may be but because some babies need a quiet moment then to settle down and eat). Also consider what room you might be able to use as a quiet place for babies who need a nap and where you could provide space for changing baby's diapers.
- Take care of any last minute cleaning. Now is not the time to do the major work but often there are surfaces that need a final wipe down or dusting. Perhaps this could be delegated to the kids or another family member.