



**HOLIDAY
FLAVORS**

Turkey Alternatives

While the holidays are a great time for tradition, spice up your holiday meal this year with these festive alternatives to the usual roasted turkey.

TURDUCKEN

This unusual dish was born on the bayou and is exactly what it sounds like: a boneless chicken stuffed inside a boneless duck inside a boneless turkey, usually with a cornbread or other traditional Southern-style stuffing inside. Rich in flavor and spice, this ready-made dish requires minimal work. Ask your local grocer to stock an option from one of several companies offering this delicacy.

ROAST BEAST

This isn't your average pot roast. A prime cut of roast beef is gaining in popularity as a holiday centerpiece. Ask your butcher for a standing rib roast for maximum wow factor; another great cut to consider is a New York strip roast. Prep work for this dish doesn't have to be hard. Remember that when you're cooking top cuts of beef, you really want the flavor of the meat to shine through. Don't go overboard; keep your seasonings simple.

GO SMALL

Feeding just a few this year? Get all the

flavor in a smaller package with a roasted chicken or even Cornish hens. For a moist, flavorful bird, try a brine. Brines can be either wet or dry, but salt is key to either method. A wet brine requires a vessel that can hold your entire bird (or birds, if you're going Cornish) and produces a juicier fowl. Dry brines mean more delicious, crispy skin and a shorter prep time. (Once you get a dry brine down pat, it could even be quick enough for a weeknight supper.)

RECIPE: EASY HOLIDAY ROAST BEEF

1 5-pound top-cut beef roast, such as New York strip or prime rib
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1 cup Montreal steak seasoning
1/4 cup rosemary, or to taste
Let the roast come to room temperature, standing on the counter for at least an hour.
Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Rub the roast with garlic, steak seasoning and rosemary. Turn the roast fat-side up (if there is one) in a baking dish.
3. Roast the meat for an hour. Turn the oven off and leave the roast inside, door shut and undisturbed, for about three hours. Turn the oven back to 375 and roast for 30 to 40 minutes, or until a thermometer reaches the temperature for your desired doneness (130-140 degrees for medium rare, 140-150 for medium, 150-155 for medium well).



Holiday Cocktails

Wrapping your freezing fingers around a toasty warm cocktail is the perfect way to ward off winter's chill. Here are some tips for making a great hot beverage.

GOOD INGREDIENTS, BETTER DRINK

If you're looking to impress your guests, now is the time to go with the good stuff. Dump those packets of ready-made hot chocolate. Get out a saucepan, a whisk and a good baking cocoa, and make it rich by using whole milk or real cream. You also can give just about any drink a kick with a good spice. Cayenne pepper, in small doses, plays surprisingly well in a hot cocoa. Or give it a minty blast with creme de menthe. You'll never go back to the paper packet again.

A WEE DRAM

Whiskey is having a moment, and your trusted local liquor store can offer you a great selection for a round of tasting with friends. Ask lots of questions to learn about the type of whiskey (Scotch, bourbon, rye), the key flavor notes (vanilla, oak, caramel) and the processes that made those flavors (type of cask, aging, single or blended). Choose three or four bottles of your favorites and gather 'round the fire to talk whiskey with your guests. Serve a sip of each in an elegant clear glass to show off the liquor's color as you regale them with your wis-



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key knowledge.

FRUIT CAN GET COZY, TOO

While we usually think of fruity cocktails as a summer-

time staple, fruit has its place in warm winter drinks, as well. Remember the carol "Here We Come A-Wassailing"? Wassail is a hot spiced apple cider that

becomes spectacular with the addition of bourbon. And don't forget mulled wines; mulling spices are usually available in easy-to-use packets at your local grocery

around the holidays. Drop them in your slow cooker with the wine (following the manufacturer's directions, of course) for an easy, welcoming drink for your guests.

Limelight-stealing Sides

The turkey or holiday roast may get all the glory, but the side dishes are the beating heart of the holiday table.

What you serve year to year often depends on where you live. Southerners tend to prefer a cornbread dressing, while Northerners like a white bread stuffing. Here are three side dishes that will fit in on any table.

CRANBERRY SAUCE

It's not just for turkey. The sweet, tangy flavor of cranberries goes great with chicken, pork and just about any white meat, and even some red meats, such as lamb. Skip the can and try making your own this year; you'll find that it's just a little bit harder than dropping that ridged jelly roll out of its tin.

Look for whole berries in your grocery store's produce section starting around Thanksgiving. Cook them with sugar and citrus zest (the fun part is watching the berries pop) for a jewel-toned winner of a dish.

ROAST AWAY

You've already got the oven hot from your big bird or roast beef. Go ahead and use that heat for some of winter's best root veggies. A blast of the oven does sweet wonders for root veggies such as carrots, and even greens such as broccoli and Brussels sprouts turn succulently sweet under the



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heat. They also gain a ton of flavor from a splash of good Balsamic vinegar or a sprinkle of fine hard cheese such as Parmesan. Forget those soggy vegetables of feasts past. These just might steal the

show from your centerpiece.

SQUASH STARS

Winter brings hardy squashes such as butternut squash, sugar pumpkins and acorn squash. Look to your local gro-

cer or farmers market for especially sweet varieties that are versatile, too. These gorgeous gourds can go in the oven as part of a roasted vegetable medley or stand on their own as a soup, baked with a touch

of olive oil and rosemary, or in an elegant puree. Winter squashes take spice and sweet flavors easily. Get outside of the box with a curried pumpkin soup or a caramelized onion and butternut squash tart.

Cookie Exchange

Holiday cookies are a great tradition, but there's a way you can have cookies and a party, all at the same time.

Welcome to the cookie exchange, where everyone goes home with a big box of all different kinds of holiday treats. You can't get much merrier than that. Here are some tips for throwing the most memorable holiday party of the year.

MAKE A COOKBOOK

Have your guests include the name of the cookie they're bringing when they RSVP so you don't get a ton of chocolate chip. Ask them to send their recipes, too, then compile the recipes into a cookbook for your guests to take home. This can be something as simple as yarn- or staple-bound paper. Visit a local stationery store for unique, festive holiday paper to make it more memorable.

THINK FLOW

When you're setting up your home for a cookie exchange, think how people will move through the house from cookie plate to cookie plate. These types of parties require plenty of room for everyone to move around, not just stand and nibble at canapes. You'll also need plenty of room for

everyone to display their dozens of cookies, as well as places to sit when the initial cookie buzz winds down.

CONTAINERS GALORE

Your guests will be leaving with dozens and dozens of cookies, but they might not bring a container large enough to hold their bounty. Keep plenty of inexpensive plastic bowls on hand for people to take their cookies home. Likewise, have a few bright, festive trays and platters in case someone forgets or, heaven forbid, breaks one. Local grocers and department stores usually have trays aplenty during the holiday season; pick up a few when you're out looking for gifts.

MORE THAN JUST COOKIES

Even though cookies are the star of the party, a good hostess will also provide other snacks for her guests. Go for salty or savory finger foods that are easy to hold to cut the sweet, rich cookies. Also don't forget the drinks; stock plenty of water to wash down all that sugar and hot drinks such as tea and coffee to ward off winter's chill.



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Delightful Dips

No holiday party is complete without an assortment of good dips. Everything goes with a dip. Warm toasted bread, crisp vegetables, sweet fruit, crunchy chips — the sky's the limit.

Here are a few good dips you can personalize for yours and your guests' tastes.

GO CREAMY

Choose a rich and creamy base such as cream cheese cut with mayonnaise or sour cream, then add fresh chopped herbs, chopped peppers or just about any other savory flavor. Let your imagination fly.

If you like a stiffer dip, mix

in less mayo or sour cream. If you need a creamier dip, go for more of the thinner dairy product.

If you're especially pressed for time, soften a brick of cream cheese and drizzle a piquant jelly over the top. Pepper jellies, often paired with something deeply sweet such as mango, are available at most quality grocers. Break out the fancy crackers and voila, a delicious appetizer

that took practically no time.

GO CHEESY

Nothing pleases a party like a cheese dip. From the simple (yet delicious) Ro-tel tomatoes and processed cheese to the elegant spinach-and-artichoke dip, these warm classics are sure to be popular.

When you're making a cheese dip, make sure you or your host have a way to keep it warm; cold cheese dip

tends to turn into a rock-hard mess. An exception is the Southern classic pimento cheese; you'll need a way to keep it cold. Safety first.

GO MEATY

Hearty meat dips such as buffalo chicken dip or seafood spreads made from crab or shrimp also are a party-friendly choice. For the buffalo chicken dip, a riff on buffalo chicken wings, the

hot sauce and the blue cheese are key. Look for quality hot sauce and a good blue cheese at your local grocer's. This versatile dip also can be served with veggies such as the classic celery and carrot sticks. If you're working with crab or shrimp, make sure your seafood is fresh and responsibly sourced. Ask your grocer if you're not sure, and avoid any crab or shrimp that smells fishy; it's not fresh.

Elegant Cheese

A different spin on a traditional holiday party is to set up a table of cheese boards. While cheese can seem boring, with a little effort, you can set up a spread that holds a lot of variety and packs plenty of flavor.

Here's how to set up a delicious party to impress.

KNOW YOUR CHEESE

Hard cheese, soft cheese, semisoft cheese, aged cheese, farmers cheese, yellow cheese, Swiss cheese — it's enough to make your head spin. What you need here is a great cheese counter and someone who knows what they're doing behind it. A great cheesemonger will be able to tell you which cheese goes best with which flavors, and you should get to sample a few, too. Make sure to get a wide variety of flavors, from mild to sharp, to please all your guests.

KNOW YOUR TOOLS

You'll also need the right tools for this party, such as cheese knives and slicers, to make the job easier, as well as picks and forks for quick and simple serving. There also are a variety of different ways to present your precious cheeses. Boards, serving trays, platters, set up a pleasing variety of serving dishes that draw the eye and set off your wedges, slices and dices. Make sure you have some way — either on a slate, on the board itself or with a place card — to display the name of the cheeses your guests are tasting.



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KNOW YOUR SIDES

Even though the cheese is on center stage, you'll need some backup singers. Wine is a popular choice; choose bot-

ties that best compliment your cheeses. Your cheesemonger and knowledgeable grocery or liquor store staff can help you. Or, have each

guest bring a bottle for everyone to try. Also stock plenty of fruit, crackers and other accompaniments, as well as a selection of meats. Cured

meats such as prosciutto are great choices, especially when you add strongly flavored condiments such as spicy mustard.

Candies Great for Gifting

Winter, with its cooler temperatures, is a good time for making candy. Homemade candy adds a warm and personal touch to your holiday gifts.

Don't be intimidated by the science behind turning sugar into candy; with the right tools, candy-making is a snap.

SCIENCE

When you're making candy, what you're really doing is cooking the moisture out of a sugary mixture. As the moisture cooks out, the sugar concentration soars and the candy gets harder.

The more moisture, the softer the candy. Less moisture means harder, more brittle candy. Candy-making also usually happens quickly. Make sure to measure your ingredients before you cook and have all your tools at hand.

TOOLS

You probably already have most of the tools you need for making candy. A good, heavy pot; cookie sheets; and whisks and cooking spoons that are comfortable to hold (most recipes involve a fair amount of stirring).

One tool you might not have that you should consider is a candy thermometer. This is a special thermometer that conveniently clips onto the side of a pot and also usually includes the stages of candy making (soft ball, hard crack, etc.) as well as the temperatures.

Find candy thermometers in the kitchen tools section of most grocery stores.

FUDGE

One of the most popular holiday



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candies is rich, creamy fudge. It's also one of the most versatile and, with the right recipe, one of the most forgiving candies out there.

Most fudge recipes are chocolate, and you can mix in nuts, spices and fruit to any basic recipe to really amp up the flavor. Most fudge recipes also are gluten-free.

Peanut butter fudges also are a great choice and offer some of the easiest recipes to make.

BRITTLE

Similar to fudge, brittle recipes also are extraordinarily versatile and can be very easy to make. When choosing ingredients for your brittle, make sure to keep color and texture in mind. Combinations such as white chocolate, dried cranberries and pistachios offer a vivid holiday treat suitable for gifting. For nut brittles, you'll be cooking a sugar mixture to the hard crack stage, so a thermometer is key.

SIMPLE PEANUT BUTTER FUDGE

1/2 cup butter
2 cups brown sugar
1/2 cup milk
3/4 cup peanut butter
1 teaspoon vanilla

3 cups confectioner's sugar
Melt butter in a pot on medium heat. Stir in milk and brown sugar; stir until boiling and boil for 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat, add peanut butter and vanilla and stir. Pour over confectioner's sugar in a large mixing bowl, and stir until thoroughly mixed. Pour into an 8x8 pan and chill until hardened.