

Prep and destroy

A Thanksgiving plan for those who don't



Want to go insane for the holidays? Look up Martha Stewart's various "countdown" planners online. "Three weeks before Thanksgiving ... pack away the Halloween decorations, it's time for turkey and pumpkin pie!" Three weeks?! Whoa, slow your roll, Martha.

by
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If you're pressing linens and crafting a homemade centerpiece and individual place cards, then yeah, you are probably already behind schedule.

But for the rest of us who usually wait until we get out of work the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and then cram all of our prep into that night, we don't have the leisure of committing three weeks of our lives to one dinner.

But Martha isn't wrong. Spreading the work out will make for less-stressed hosts who will be able to enjoy the party alongside friends and family—which is, like, the whole point of the holiday. But a one-week timeline is sufficient for mental health. Below is the loose and reasonable schedule I follow when I'm engineering the party train (plus, a favorite pre-preparable recipe for stuffing in a pumpkin).

The Friday night before, pour a glass of wine and make a shopping list of ingredients, including pantry standbys (flour, oils, spices, etc.) that might need restocking, plus any disposable plates/cutlery/napkins if needed, and to-go containers for leftovers.

Over the weekend, do the heavy lifting. Saturday morning, clean out the fridge and cupboards and make room for turkey, ingredients, drinks, etc. Shop during the day, restock, then pour another glass of wine. Sunday: Put on your Cleaning House Playlist, turn up volume, choose low-alcohol beverages for optimal day-drinking, and dance/clean until desired level of presentability.

During the week, devote a couple of hours each evening to food prep. First night: Fully or partially prepare a side or two. (Snap the green beans? Cook most of the stuffing ingredients?) Second night: Fully or partially prepare a side or two. (Bake a casserole? Make the cranberry sauce? Season turkey?) Third night: Make pie or other dessert.

Thanksgiving day: If you're planning on serving at 6 p.m. or later, you have your morning free to lazily read in bed, go on a fun run or hang with early arriving friends/relatives.

At noon: Pull the turkey out to prep/bring to

room temp. Turkey goes into the oven a 2 p.m., and if you're smart, you've invited your guests to arrive now. Many hands make light work. Save yours for cooking and assembling your meal, put a beer or glass of wine in the hands of others and assign them to cut up vegetables, set the table and, most important, wash dishes as you go. A huge after-meal pile is inevitable, but a little work early in the day makes for a mostly plate-and-utensil-only load standing between you and a slice of pumpkin pie.

Bacon, pork and beer stuffing (adapted from Beer Advocate magazine)

Ingredients:

- 1 loaf Tin Roof Bakery Chico sourdough bread (cut into 1-inch cubes)
- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 3 leeks (washed, halved and sliced—about 5 cups)
- 2 yellow onions, large (peeled and chopped)
- 4 shallots (minced)
- 4 stalks celery (chopped)
- 6 garlic cloves (crushed)
- 3 tablespoons (or so) kosher salt
- 1 pound bacon, cut thick (2-inch pieces)
- 2 pound pork, ground
- 1/2 cup fresh sage (chopped)
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds or pepitas, shelled
- 18 oz. beer (bock, doppelbock or brown ale)
- 2 cups chicken stock (or vegetable stock)
- 1 medium pumpkin (10–12 lbs.)

Early in the week: Cut the bread, dry in oven, and store in its bag. Saute veggies, salt, set aside. Cook bacon, remove meat with slotted spoon and add to veggies. Cook pork in bacon drippings, salt, stir into mixture and store in fridge in a sealable container.

Thanksgiving day: About three hours before meal-time, hollow out pumpkin; remove seeds. If more than 1 1/2 inches thick, bake by itself at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Combine pork mixture and dried bread in large bowl. Add stock and beer and fully incorporate. Add stuffing to the pumpkin. Lightly stuff—don't over-pack. Place pumpkin in roasting pan and bake at 350 degrees for 90 minutes or until internal temp is 160–175 and the pumpkin is fork-tender. Keep warm in oven. Serve from pumpkin at the table. □

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