



# Gobble

By Kerry M. Minifie

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Of all the dishes that make up the Thanksgiving feast, the big bird demands the most attention. But how best to achieve turkey perfection—golden-brown skin with moist, tender white and dark meat?

**W**e've been successfully roasting turkeys for years. But were we in a rut? Maybe it was time to rethink our traditional methods. Brining produces great-tasting birds, but it's a cumbersome process and not practical for those with limited refrigerator space. Deep-frying was out of the question: It's too risky. There had to be an easier, less complicated approach.

Getting back to basics was anything but simple. We gathered and distilled dozens of approaches into general guidelines, then tested each of them on the same brand of supermarket turkey weighing 14 to 16 pounds. We tried stuffing butter under the skin or leaving it out, basting and not basting, varying the heat versus keeping it steady. We raised the heat, we lowered it. We positioned the bird right side up and upside down. We did everything; and then we pared down to nothing (no butter, no basting, no heat variation). The results astonished us. The turkey no one bet on turned out to be vastly better than the others, winning the beautiful skin and juicy white meat contest hands down. The method? The bird was simply seasoned with salt and pepper, then roasted in a 450°F oven—no butter under the skin, no basting, no foil tent, just blasted. Skeptical, we tried it again. And again. It kept working. Attempts to improve on it were pointless. Plus, it

cooked in record time, only about 1 3/4 to 2 1/2 hours for a 14- to 16-pound bird. (An important note: Starting with a clean oven prevents smoking at high heat. Clean your oven again after roasting because of splatter.) The high-heat method is nothing new. Cookbook author Barbara Kafka popularized it for chickens and turkeys in her 1995 book *Roasting*, in which she cranked her oven up to 500 degrees. We compromised on 450 degrees to get the benefits of high heat while lessening any risk of burning the pan juices. Harold McGee, food scientist and author of the newly revised *On Food and Cooking*, confirmed he's had similarly fine results with the same method. He surmises that because the bird cooks faster at a higher temperature, the outer portions of the breast have less time to become overcooked before the deepest portions cook through.

If you've become enamored of brining, as we have, and want to continue, using this method, feel free; it will make for an even juicier, more flavorful bird. (But don't use the pan juices for gravy; they're too salty.) And if you're in the mood for something less than basic but still delicious, try our cover turkey, which features the cross-cultural innovation of using miso to flavor and tenderize the meat. This, however, is a higher-heat followed by lower-heat method. The miso butter blackened the skin when subjected to constant high heat. >>