Thanksgiving is just around the corner. While thinking about what the meal costs, have you ever considered about how much you pay for the utilities to cook it?

If you are cooking on the electric stove, the cost can add to your overall expenses. Here’s the cost, depending on what heating source you use. I’ve done some calculations based on the prices we pay locally for electricity and the average kilowatts used by each of these appliances per hour.

If you use the small burner on your stove, it will cost you 18 cents per hour. Moving to the big burner on the stove will cost you double that amount. The oven runs 43 cents per hour. If you move to portable appliances, the roaster checks in at 21 cents. The slow cooker is a real bargain at 2.4 cents an hour, but be sure to factor in the increased time required to cook your products. The microwave is a bit of a challenge with many holiday meals because of the size restrictions, but it can be run at 24 to 29 cents an hour, depending on the wattage.

The biggest cost is preparing the holiday turkey. The oven is the usual way we cook it. With a four-hour cooking time for a turkey, you can figure on spending $1.72 to cook that bird in the oven.

However, you can reduce that oven cooking time in a couple of ways. Take a pair of kitchen shears and cut down each side of the backbone; it’s called spatchcocking. Flatten the turkey out and increase the oven temperature to 400 degrees. You will reduce the cooking time by about one-third. Not only will it cook faster, it will also cook more evenly and result in a moister bird. Be sure to use a thermometer to make sure you reach the safe temperature of 165 degrees. Or simply cut the turkey up as you would a chicken and reduce the time even more. The key is heat penetration. The smaller the pieces, the faster the cooking time.
It is a bit impractical to use a slow cooker or the microwave, mostly because of the size of the turkey. The largest turkey that will fit in a microwave is about 12 to 14 pounds. And if you choose a crock pot, it must be turkey pieces or a chicken.

If you choose to use the oven for the turkey, make sure you are cooking all your holiday dishes at the same time, making the most of the heat used. We have two habits that interfere with the efficiency of our ovens. First, quit peeking in the oven. Opening the door can decrease the temperature inside by 50 degrees. Keep the door shut and look through the window to see how things are progressing. Also preheating is only necessary when you are preparing baked goods. However, if your oven preheats by turning on the broiler until it reaches the correct temperature, make sure you don't burn your items in the early stages of heating.

Consider cooking side dishes in the electric skillet (only 14 cents an hour), which is slightly lower than the large burner or use the small burner. It is less expensive than using the larger burner.

Our examples are for electricity, but those who use a propane stove will have a similar reduction in costs.

Though we are talking about the holiday meal, these estimated costs will help you reduce your expenditure throughout the year.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is associate director of Cooperative Extension Service, a part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-7201.