



Extension News Column

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Turkey is the star of our holiday meals, but it can be a great bargain for your family meals throughout the year. It is a more economical than chicken because it has more meat in relation to the bone and of course, bone is the part we throw away. This week, frozen turkeys were costing about a dollar per pound, while a whole chicken is nearly double that cost. With a lower price and more meat to bone, turkey is a bargain. But what do you do with it? If you are someone that has never done anything but roast a turkey (or maybe you've never even done that), it can be quite intimidating to look at that large bird and try to plan meals.

An easy way to handle the turkey is to roast it and eat it for one meal. Remove the rest of the meat from the bones and package it in freezer packages appropriate for your family. I usually pack the sliced meat in 1 1/2 to 2 lb packages for my family. These can be reheated just as is, used in sandwiches, or served with rice, pasta, potatoes and accompanied with a nice sauce. The smaller pieces or chunks are frozen in bags of about 2 cups. Many recipes call for two cups of cooked chicken or turkey, so we want it to be ready to go in the appropriate amounts. These bags become enchiladas, casseroles, soups, or salads. If you still have some energy left, boil the bones and get the last bits of turkey from the carcass. Discard the bones and refrigerate the broth. All the fat will float to the top and harden. This makes it easy to throw away the excess fat rather than skimming it off. Make a soup for the next night's supper or freeze the broth and turkey meat for another occasion.

I find that a 20 lb turkey can provide me with one large family meal, 2 or 3 meals of sliced meat, a couple of casseroles, and 2 batches of soup. Seven meals for a cost of about \$20 is a bargain in my book.

If you are intimidated by working with this much meat at once, or if you have a smaller family, cut the turkey up. You can cut it into three family sized meals if you are just a little handy with a knife. Turkeys have the same bone structure as a chicken, so if you can cut up a chicken, you can cut up a turkey. The turkey needs to be thawed to cut, though some ice crystals are fine. Cut the legs and thighs off the bird, which becomes one meal. Cut the wings off, which go in the boiling pot. Then finally, cut the turkey down the sides, separating the front ribs from the back ribs. This gives you the separate breast for one meal, with the back joining the wings in the boiling pot. This sounds complicated, but is easy to do. Cutting instructions are available by calling 474-2420.

We also have a great pamphlet called “Turkey Turnarounds” that give recipes to use all those packages of turkey meat, so request it at the same time you ask for the cutting instructions.

No matter which method you choose, turkey can be a real dollar saver in your family budget.