



Extension News Column

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Thanksgiving is upon us. Today instead of talking about how to save money on those holiday celebrations, we'll be talking about saving time as you prepare for the holiday meal. A hassle free holiday can be in your future. Let's go through each part of the meal and see how we can save a little time, energy, and occasionally, some money.

It doesn't take much effort to roast a turkey, but it does take time. So consider buying a fully cooked turkey. I found a roasted turkey at the grocery store for \$23 (10 lbs), and a smoked turkey for \$25. An uncooked bird will cost \$1 a pound--\$20 for a 20 lb. bird. But you need to figure what the cooking would cost as well as shrinkage from cooking (about 40% of the raw weight). That 20 lb turkey will weigh 12 lbs when cooked and would cost \$2 for 4 hours oven time. That's not much different than the roasted turkey.

Sweet potatoes are a traditional dish for this time of year. Save time by skipping the casserole preparation and bake sweet potatoes in the oven or the microwave. Then offer the gooey traditional casserole toppings on the side at the table. In small bowls, set out marshmallows, chopped walnuts or pecans, brown sugar, and plenty of butter. When that baked sweet potato comes out of the oven, the toppings will melt and meld into those traditional flavors.

Consider using your Crock-pot instead of stuffing the turkey. The turkey will cook faster without it being stuffed, and the stuffing will be moist and flavorful. Cooking time will vary depending on your crock pot, but figure on four to eight hours depending on how hot your pot cooks.

Salads are easily done using pre-washed greens and adding mixed vegetables to finish off the meal. Making your own dressing is a great way to save both calories and money. Mix 1/2 cup of vinegar (especially if you have a fruit flavored or balsamic vinegar), 1/2 cup of your favorite oil, and 1/8 teaspoon of your favorite spices or herbs. Place it in the bottom of your salad bowl, then put your greens in the bowl. Don't toss it yet. The greens will stay fresh until the moment you toss them, immediately before you serve the meal.

Vegetable trays are easily assembled from baby carrots that are ready to serve from the bag and broccoli and cauliflower that just needs to be broken up into bite sized pieces or buy a bag of these vegetables. Slice up some green peppers and zucchini and serve with dressing. The job is done.

Rolls don't have to be made from scratch. Pick up rolls from the bakery for \$3.99 (for a dozen), buy the brown and serve variety, or buy frozen bread dough (\$3.80 for 2 loaves). No one will know you haven't slaved all morning. I have a great recipe for homemade rolls that can be mixed up and kept in the refrigerator for up to 6 weeks. Make a large batch of dough in advance and pull out enough to serve for your holiday meal. There will be plenty left over for another occasion. If you want the recipe, just give me a yell and I'll share.

The last part of the meal is dessert. The grocery stores run some killer specials on pies and cakes this time of year. In fact, often there is no way for you to make a pie as cheaply as they are selling them. So just buy the commercial pie and serve it with a big scoop of ice cream. No one will care that you didn't make it from scratch. Or use a prepared pie crust, add canned pie filling and bake. I like to use one can of prepared pie filling and one can of fruit, mix it together and place in a prepared pie crust and bake it.

Another easy dessert is to bake apples. Leave the peel intact, and cut the core (seeds and stem) out of the apples. Place them in a shallow baking dish, fill the holes with brown sugar, raisins, 1/4 teaspoon of cinnamon, and 1 tablespoon butter. Bake until tender and bubbly (usually about 45 minutes). Tastes like apple pie without the extra calories from the crust or the extra trouble of peeling and slicing those apples.

Remember this time of year it is the time you spend with your family and friends that is important. Pare down those meal preparations and enjoy your company.