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Deep Fat Frying Turkeys

Carol J. Plate, Extension Educator

Deep fat frying began in the southern part of the United States and has gradually spread nationwide. Turkeys are the most common food prepared by this method. However, chicken, turkey parts (breast, wings and thighs), and Cornish game hens may be deep fat fried. Deep fat frying results in a juicy product because the hot fat seals the outside and the skin becomes crisp.

Equipment

A deep fat fryer may be purchased or you can use a 40-60 quart pot with basket, burner and propane gas tank. The pot should be larger than the burner. Due to the increasing reports of fires and burns related to deep fat fryers, the Underwriters Laboratory Inc. (UL) has decided not to certify any turkey fryers with the UL Mark.

Dangers include:

- Tipping with spills of five gallons of hot oil.
- If the pot is overfilled with oil, the oil may spill when placing the turkey into the pot. Oil may catch on fire and engulf the unit.
- Partially frozen turkeys also can cause spattering and spill over.
- If there is no thermostat, the oil may be overheated to the point of combustion.
- The entire pot becomes dangerously hot.

A candy thermometer is necessary to check oil temperature.

A meat thermometer is necessary to check doneness of the meat.

Have an all-purpose fire extinguisher close by. Never use water or a water-based extinguisher as it will cause an oil fire to spread.

Use heavy pot holders, well insulated gloves or oven mitts. Cover arms with a long-sleeved shirt. Wear heavy protective shoes. Wear safety goggles to protect eyes from oil splatters.

To add flavor to the meat, you may want an injector.

Ingredients

Smaller turkeys, 8-10 pounds, and turkey parts such as breast, wings, and thighs are best for frying.

Approximately 5 gallons of cooking oil are necessary, more for large turkeys. Only oil with a high smoke point should be used — peanut, canola, corn, or sunflower. Peanut oil adds flavor, but some people may be allergic to it. Canola oil is low in saturated fat and could be combined with peanut oil if fat and cholesterol are a problem.

Preparation

To determine the correct amount of oil, place the turkey in a basket and place it in the cooking pot. Add water until it reaches 1-2 inches above the turkey. Remove the turkey and mark the water level on the pot. Pour out the water and dry the pot thoroughly. (Be sure to measure for oil before breading or marinating the turkey.) Add oil to the pot to the determined level.

Thaw turkey completely. Remove giblets and neck. Remove skin if desired. Inject marinade if desired. Turkey may be injected and refrigerated overnight to distribute flavor more evenly. Do not stuff a turkey for deep fat frying. Just before inserting the turkey in oil, use paper towels to pat the turkey dry inside and out. If you wish to bread the turkey, place it in a gallon-sized storage bag and shake to coat.

Heat the oil to 350°F. Check with a candy thermometer. Keep oil above 340°F. or oil will begin seeping into the bird.

Frying

Once the oil has reached 350°F., place the turkey in the basket, feet up, and carefully lower into the pot. Do not use a lid while frying.

Whole turkeys require approximately 3-5 minutes per pound to cook. Remove turkey, drain oil from cavity, and check internal temperature with a meat thermometer. The breast must reach 170°F. and the thigh should be 180°F. If not done, return to the hot oil immediately for additional cooking. A turkey which is done should start to float.

Turkey parts require approximately 4-5 minutes per pound to reach appropriate temperatures.

Chicken and Cornish game hens require about 9 minutes per pound because oil cannot circulate as well in smaller cavities.

Allow turkey to drain for 20-30 minutes before carving.

You may wish to do several birds at one time while the oil is hot. Turkey meat freezes well.

Follow manufacturers instructions exactly for the use of your fryer.

Reuse of Oil

Allow oil to cool before storing.

High smoke-point oils allow reuse with proper filtration. Strain the oil through a fine strainer and then filter through fine cheesecloth.

Oil must be covered and refrigerated to prevent rancidity. It may be kept for several months or until signs of deterioration occur: foaming, darkening, smoking excessively, rancid smell, or failure to bubble when food is added. Oil will thicken when chilled but will return to its original consistency when reheated.

Oils may be used 3-4 times if well filtered and refrigerated.

Precautions

- Always use a deep fat fryer outdoors, never on a deck or in a garage. Place fryer a safe distance from buildings. Place fryer on level dirt or grassy area, not on wood or concrete which may be stained by hot oil spills.
- Never leave the fryer unattended. Most units do not have thermostats so temperature must be monitored regularly.
- Never let children or pets near the fryer while cooking or cooling. Oil remains hot for several hours.
- Do not consume alcohol while cooking. Proper safety includes waiting until the turkey is fried and drained, and oil in the pot is cool.
- Do not overfill the fryer.
- Never put your face directly over the pot.

- Use completely thawed meat.
- Use caution with marinades as water in hot oil can cause a fire or explosion.
- Slide thawed turkey into hot oil carefully to avoid splashing or spillage.
- Do not crowd the pot. Oil needs to circulate freely around the bird.
- Keep an all-purpose fire extinguisher nearby.
- Allow oil to cool completely before disposing or storing.
- Immediately wash hands, utensils, equipment, and surfaces that have come in contact with raw meat.
- Turkey should be consumed and leftovers refrigerated within two hours of cooking.
- Use a drip pan under the turkey fryer in case of accidental spillage or boiling over of oil.
- Remember, begin with well washed hands and clean utensils and keep them that way throughout the process.

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