

The Xmas Turkey... and in the end, all year round poultry.

All weird and sort of a non event, the family was scattering in numerous directions, we decided to have a festive breakfast. I don't know about you, but breakfast for me is all about a decent cup of tea, pot not teabag, a slice of my own home baked 100% wholemeal, tastes good and satisfies health issues, butter and vegemite. I cannot, as hard as I try, get into the whole champagne, fruit juice and the million and one things that now seem to grace the breakfast table. There simply must be a limit to the ways you can serve eggs. I cannot bring myself to leap into meat at that hour and the prospect of cake, repels. Confusion. In the end, I made pancakes, it was the least I could do.

They came, opened gifts, ate breakfast and went. Those left holding the Xmas candle were left with a sort of vacant, what the hell happened and why, look on their face. In the afternoon as I settled into the snoozing and reading chair, I reflected that it did not feel like Xmas at all, even if the tree was draped in bits of Xmas from years past, the pair of not quite right deers hauling a sleigh that had seen better days, graced the mantle shelf. Even the black crepe paper decorations I had purchased in a strange moment of anti celebration hung desolately over the dining table. Scene set, no action.

Boxing Day had been designated as family festive food day. The night before I had started the turkey brining, put some wine in to chill, worried all over again that no one in the household except me liked plum pudding, asked the promises of the vegetable run if they were ready, roasted the ham with a glaze that I was not fond of.... that whole glaze issue is fraught, you simply have to have some thick sugar laden number that will stick and rise to the occasion. I even took great care to skin the pork carefully, not being the patient and manually dexterous type, I have been known to rip a bit hard at removing the skin and leave the fat layer in less than pristine shape. Xmas had come and gone, this was another day, another event completely.

I am a creature of habit, up early on Boxing Day, cup of tea, toast and turn the oven on high. I had a Ledoux turkey to roast to perfection. I was well behaved and followed the recipe (below). I have this 45 year long argument with some family members who want to eat everything searingly hot whereas I want it mildly room temperature. Allowing for the size of the bird, a 2 hour cook and good rest after all that heat and indignity would be about right. Stuffing was a separate thing and was already in the loaf tin. We have always had a Swedish style potatoes and they were lying in their bath of cream garlic and anchovie, beans topped and tailed and someone was running up a cauliflower cheese. Someone else was inspecting a bowl of ripe tomatoes preparatory to roasting them with whole garlic cloves and basil leaves. The ham was out and on the sideboard, a side of smoked salmon with a Swedish dill mayonaise (is there a theme emerging here I am unaware of?) shared the location. In my over enthusiasm I had also purchased a standing rib roast and that was rubbed with salt, annointed with oil and waiting its turn in the now pulsating oven. Gravy was not even a remote non event, it was demanded by several family members and would be closely tasted and critically assessed, so I had to get that happening. I went down the middle road, roasted a bunch of beef and turkey bones until they were brown, added some water, the turkey neck and giblets for a damn fine stock and then reduced it a bit. Gravy started. A salad or two would see it all done.

Time for a bit of reflection.

I doubt that Poppy or Aunty Pearl, or my father and mother had ever tasted turkey... it was just not often eaten or even available. I remember once when going with Dad on his 'country round' delivering meat, one of the farmers had a flock (called I think a rafter of) of turkeys that sort of ran wild, along with a gaggle of geese and essentially intimidated the entire farm. I was completely freaked out and refused to get down off the horse and cart dad used, the horse was not impressed either. They were destined for the table the farmer said, My family were butchers, I cannot ever recall seeing

them selling poultry of any kind. I suspect that a few of the top enders of Port Fairy ate turkey and goose for Xmas, Dad usually killed one of the older chooks stuffed, very long cooked chook that was maybe one of just six eaten during the year. Ducks we ate when Dad went out in duck hunting season and brought home a bunch of wild ones. Hearn's Hotel always offered turkey for Xmas lunch, we just never went, Mum would have viewed that as a great extravagance.

In time, we all tasted turkey and became seduced. Why it was turkey and not goose or duck is a mystery, it is a native of the Americas [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey\\_\(bird\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey_(bird)). Geese are found in many countries including Asia, Ducks are world wide. Perhaps again another example of the formidable power of the USA in influencing. Turkey it is then.

I searched and hunted and I think in the end, found a great, no, bloody fabulous bird, produced by the Ledoux family in Gippsland, free range, organic (genuine) and tasty. Judy Ledoux just told me that they supply just 4000 birds in any one year, she says that it keeps the quality high and allows them to be sure of it. She is the sort of supplier that we all need to find.

I am going to repeat myself... this is the BEST way to cook big bird.. (Nigella calls it that.. and good on her, she deserves a break)....

Brining Turkey's is good, makes the bird moist, keeps a great flavor. So choose either the salt brine (for big birds like Turkey this is best) or the lemon juice method (best for smaller birds)... but do please give the high temperature a go. It will produce a moist crispy skinned bird.

#### Salt water/Sugar brine

You must start the evening before... the turkey must be fully thawed the bird should be submerged in the brine solution and preferably kept in a cool/chill (refrigerator) situation. It would be an 8 hour, no longer brine.

This solution should be enough for a 5 kg to 8 kg bird.

3 litres of chicken stock 275 grams of table salt 1/4 cup sugar (brown is best) 1 tablespoon dried sage 1 tablespoon crushed dried rosemary 1 tablespoon dried thyme 1 litre of iced water..

Bring stock, salt, sugar and herbs to the boil, allow to cool add the litre of iced water. and cool completely.

I like to use a clean plastic bucket that will hold the turkey easily with the brine. Place the brine into the bucket.

Wash and dry the turkey and lower the bird breast first into the bucket making sure that the cavities are filled with the brine. Place the bucket into the refrigerator over night. If the refrigerator is otherwise occupied, consider using a chiller or even a styrene box. Remove the turkey and dry completely. Make a mixture of Olive Oil, garlic, finely chopped herbs and pepper, rub this well into the cavity of the bird.

#### Salt and Lemon Juice.

The salt and lemon juice method is more for me about taste. I love lemon and I love what it does to foods. I also acknowledge that this method is slightly 'awkward, but give it a shot.

Your object is to cover the turkey in lemon juice, generously and then also generously, cover the bird in salt. No, not a snow field of salt, rather a scattering, 7 kilo turkey would take about 1/2 a cup of salt. Having done both of the above, wrap the bird in plastic film and put aside (on the bench) for 45 minutes. This will allow time to heat the oven. Prepare a seasoning.

### Stuffing or as we always called it, seasoning.

Cooking a turkey without stuffing is better. The argument goes that the stuffing will impede the heat from reaching the inside of the bird and make it more uneven in cooking. This is not something that I have ever suggested, I have held the view that the stuffing added to the deliciousness of the bird, but I have to reluctantly admit minus stuffing is better, is true. Your stuffing can be cooked separately and we suggest our new Persian stuffing mix.

### High Heat Cooking Method

As a preparation for the cooking, remove the wing tips from the turkey and if you have been given the neck and the giblets, place them in about half a litre of water and cook for 45 minutes, use this to make the pan gravy.

Cooking the Turkey on HIGH heat is the best way. This method requires a bit of preliminary work... a very clean oven, a baking pan with sides no higher than 5 cm and nerves of steel. The cooking is done at 240 to 250 Celsius and the oven MUST be preheated. The rule is 18 minutes per kilo. For the first 45 minutes, no matter what, do NOT open the oven. Resist the temptation to baste. And cook the bird on a V trivet breast side down, don't truss the bird. It will or should be brown and crisp and very moist at the end of the cooking time. After 45 minutes, take the bird from the oven and turn it over breast side up, return to the oven for the balance of time, still on high heat. If the bird is getting too browned, cut some foil and make a double layer draped, but not tucked in on top of the bird, (remove the foil 10 minutes before the end of the cooking time) and continue cooking. For a near 7 kilo bird, the cooking time should be about 2 hours. The bird should be allowed to stand for 20 minutes after cooking, covered, but not tightly or you will lose the crispy skin.

### Gravy

Make a gravy (sauce) but please no flour... just pour off as much of the fat as possible, add a couple of cups of stock (turkey stock if you have it as described above, if not chicken stock) and bring to the pan to a good rolling boil, this sauce is thin, but very tasty. The other option is to stir in a couple of big spoons of a very good Red Currant Jelly (PW brand is good and made in house) to enrich the sauce.

### The Rest

The stuffing should be made up according to the instructions, it is best cooked in a loaf tin, usually I would cover it in foil and add a little extra oil.. You can cook this in advance and simply warm it.

If you want roasted vegetables, do NOT cook them with the turkey, they can be done in advance, or as the turkey is having a rest after the heat of the oven, twenty minutes rest is suggested.

There you go...Now let me tell you the very good news, you can apply all of this to any poultry, the brining, the the high temperature roasting works really well on ducks and geese, it will remove a lot of the fat and you will end up with desirable crisp skin and moist flesh.

Felice Navidas, Buon Natale, Happy Xmas, it was all go. Years of being in food had left me a bit bad at the whole feast thing, it is some sort of subconscious thing that forbids me from nose diving into food and so, I sit back. I don't like a piled high plate, so sitting there nibbling a bit of this and that worked well.

Dessert in the house fell a bit short of my personal festive season expectations, I like a plum pudding, I love a trifle, I love a big pavlova, I like a great bowl of chocolate mousse. Instead I felt like I was on restrictions, a fine thing for ones figure, but not altogether a great end to a festive meal. We live and learn.

In the run down, my biggest moan was that we did not have a Xmas cake... that luscious fruit filled cake that was then topped with heaps of icing. I think its essential. The logic was that since I am the only one who likes it and, the only one who should NOT eat it, problem solved. Bugger.

#### Mustard Sauce "Hovmästarsås"

6 tbsp sugar

Pinch of salt

2 tbsp white wine vinegar

4 tbsp of PW's Imperial Russian Mustard

6-8 tbsp vegetable or olive oil

¼ cup chopped fresh dill

Pour the vinegar in a small bowl, mix with sugar and salt and stir until somewhat dissolved. Add mustard and oil and stir until well mixed. Cut the dill finely with scissors in a cup. Add dill to the sauce and stir to mix.

The sauce is ready to be served and can be stored for several week in the fridge.