

The Ultimate Thanksgiving Dinner Guide

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We don't celebrate Thanksgiving in Italy – at least, not in the traditional American sense. But we *do* celebrate the same spirit behind it: gathering with family, sharing food made from the heart, and being grateful for the simple joys of life. In Italy, that feeling comes alive during big Sunday lunches or holiday feasts – long meals that stretch into the afternoon, filled with laughter, stories, and too many delicious dishes to count.

When I moved to America, I instantly fell in love with Thanksgiving. It reminded me so much of those Italian family gatherings – the warmth, the noise, the joy of being together around a table overflowing with food. Over the years, I've blended a little bit of both worlds into my celebration: classic Thanksgiving dishes with touches of Italian flavor and comfort.

Whether you're hosting for the first time or a seasoned cook

looking to freshen up your holiday menu, this guide brings together my favorite recipes from the blog – from a perfectly roasted **holiday turkey** and cozy **Italian-style soup**, to flavorful **side dishes** that make the meal unforgettable. My goal is to help you create a Thanksgiving dinner that feels joyful, comforting, and wonderfully stress-free – the kind that leaves you with time to savor every bite and every moment.

Thanksgiving Planning 101

A stress-free Thanksgiving starts with a little planning. The secret? Do as much as you can ahead of time. I like to make my shopping list a week before and start prepping small things early – chopping herbs, mixing pie dough, or even setting the table the night before.

Here's a simple plan to follow:

- **1 Week Before:** Finalize your menu and grocery list.
- **3 Days Before:** If using a frozen turkey, set in the fridge to thaw. Prep vegetables, bake desserts, and make cranberry sauce.
- **1 Day Before:** Brine or season the turkey, assemble casseroles, and set the table.
- **Thanksgiving Day:** Roast the turkey, warm the sides, and savor every moment.
 - *Tip:* Use large sheet pans or trays to organize ingredients for each dish – it keeps your prep area tidy and makes cooking so much smoother.

Defrosting Turkey

How to Defrost a Turkey

If you're using a frozen turkey, be sure to give yourself plenty of time to thaw it safely in the refrigerator. The rule of thumb is **24 hours of thawing for every 4–5 pounds of turkey**. Place the wrapped turkey on a rimmed baking sheet to catch any drips, and let it slowly defrost in the coldest part of your fridge. A large bird can take several days, so plan ahead – starting the thaw early is one of the biggest stress-savers of Thanksgiving week.

The Star of the Show – The Turkey

Every Thanksgiving table begins with the turkey, and my **Best Holiday Turkey** recipe is one I look forward to making each year. Roasted with garlic, herbs, and plenty of butter, it's juicy, tender, and full of flavor.

Even though turkey isn't something we often cooked in Italy, I've come to appreciate how it brings everyone together in the same way a big Italian roast might. The aroma fills the kitchen, the golden skin crackles as it roasts, and everyone hovers around waiting for that first slice.

Turkey Roasting Time and Temperature Guide

Oven Temperature:

- Roast at **325°F (165°C)** – the perfect balance for even cooking and a juicy bird.

Cook Time per Pound (Unstuffed Turkey):

- **15–17 minutes per pound** at 325°F

Cook Time per Pound (Stuffed Turkey):

- **16–18 minutes per pound** at 325°F

Example:

- 12-lb unstuffed turkey → about **3 to 3.5 hours**
- 16-lb unstuffed turkey → about **4 to 4.5 hours**

Pro Tips:

- Let the turkey rest for at least 30 minutes before carving.
- Always use a meat thermometer (165°F for the breast, 175°F for the thigh).
- Save the carcass – it makes the most comforting broth for soup the next day.

Hosting Tips & Timeline

A smooth Thanksgiving is all about timing and ambiance. I like to set my table the night before – candles, linens, serving pieces all ready – so I can focus on cooking and enjoying the day.

Hosting checklist:

- Create a serving plan (decide which dish goes in which pan or bowl). serving bowls
- Warm your plates before serving set in the oven after removing the turkey and turning the oven off. – it keeps the food hotter longer.
- Set out appetizers and drinks early so guests can mingle while you finish cooking.

- Keep a small pot of simmering citrus and herbs on the stove – it fills the house with the most wonderful scent.

Holiday Soup to Start the Meal . . .

Italian Holiday chicken Soup

Before the main feast begins, I love starting with something warm and cozy. My Italian Holiday Chicken Soup is light but flavorful ,

It reminds me of the simple soups my mother used to make in Italy before a big meal – meant to prepare your appetite and warm your heart. The best part? It can be made a day in advance and reheated just before serving, so it's one less thing to worry about on Thanksgiving Day.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Favorite Thanksgiving Side Dishes

No Thanksgiving table is complete without an array of sides – and in my kitchen, they often take center stage. I like mixing **traditional favorites** with **Italian-inspired twists** that bring a little Mediterranean flair to the holiday table.

Try some of these delicious sides from the blog:

Savory sausage mushroom stuffing

hearty, rich, and full of flavor.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Chicken Apple Stuffing

sweet, savory and full of fall flavors.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Easy Savory Mushroom Gravy

the perfect topping for turkey or mashed potatoes.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Balsamic Glazed Brussels Sprouts with Bacon

quick, easy, and irresistible stovetop side dish that comes together in just minutes.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Easy Cranberry Sauce in Minutes

You won't believe how quick this Easy Cranberry Sauce comes together. It takes just minutes to make, and taste better than store bought.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Parmesan scallop mashed potatoes

There is something about mashed potatoes that just says Thanksgiving. And when you take that classic and add parmesan cheese it's Italian!![GO TO RECIPE](#)

Sweet Endings – Desserts

After the feast, dessert is where the celebration continues. Whether you're a pumpkin pie traditionalist or love something a little different, these desserts bring warmth and a touch of sweetness to end the meal.

Favorite desserts from my kitchen:

Italian Crostata Jam Tart

a beautiful twist on the classic pie with a rich, moist crumb delicious and ideal for sharing.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Crescent Amaretti Cookies

crisp on the outside, chewy in the center – a holiday favorite. Serve with espresso or a small glass of dessert wine for the perfect Italian-style finish.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Caffè Affogato with Chocolate Sauce

a delicious dessert coffee drink.[GO TO RECIPE](#)

Leftovers Reinvented

If you ask me, the day after Thanksgiving might be even better than the holiday itself. Leftovers turn into comforting meals that carry the celebration into the weekend.

Try these ideas:

Easy Italian Chicken Croquettes

the linked recipe is using chicken use mashed potatoes and bits of leftover turkey instead. [GO TO RECIPE](#)

Turkey Cranberry Sandwiches

add leftover cranberry sauce and brie to your favorite artisan bread and grill [GO TO RECIPE](#)

□ *Tip:* Store leftovers in clear containers so you can easily see what you have. It helps reduce waste and makes meal planning simple.

Thanksgiving might not be an Italian tradition, but its heart – gathering together in gratitude – feels beautifully familiar. It reminds me of home, of family tables overflowing with love, laughter, and food made with care.

Whether your meal is big or small, traditional or a little Italian-inspired, I hope this guide helps you create a holiday that's full of warmth, flavor, and joyful memories.