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The Thanksgiving Make-Ahead Plan

21 days, one small job a day. By Thursday, November 26, almost everything is already done.

How the plan works

Most of a Thanksgiving dinner can be made weeks ahead. The plan gives you one dish a day, in an order that keeps the freezer filled first and the fridge clear for the final week. Each step takes one batch of cooking. Tick the box when it's done.

Weeks 1–2: Fill the freezer NOV 5 – NOV 16	Gravy, cranberry sauce, pies, casseroles, rolls and dressing. These keep 2 to 3 months frozen, so the early start costs you nothing.
Week 3: Bake ahead NOV 17 – NOV 20	Two kinds of bars, cornbread muffins and a small-crowd turkey breast, made in the last full week.
The final stretch NOV 21 – NOV 26	Turkey thawing, the slow cooker side, pumpkin pie, punch and the night-before turkey prep.

Starting late? Start at today's row.

Everything in weeks 1 and 2 freezes for at least 2 months, so you can double up on those days and still finish on time. Don't skip the turkey thaw date below: that one can't be rushed.

Turkey thaw chart

Thaw a frozen turkey in the fridge, allowing 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds. Move it to the fridge by the date in the last column for a Thursday dinner.

Turkey size	Fridge thaw time	Move it to the fridge by
12 lb	2.4 to 3 days	**Monday, November 23**
16 lb	3.2 to 4 days	**Sunday, November 22**
20 lb	4 to 5 days	**Saturday, November 21**
24 lb	4.8 to 6 days	**Friday, November 20**

Brine only once the bird is fully thawed, and never for longer than 24 hours. Turkey is done at 165°F in the thickest part.

Weeks 1–2: fill the freezer

Tap a dish name for the full recipe. On paper, search the dish name at thekitchensaid.com.

	Date	Days to go	Make this	How to do it ahead
☐	Thu Nov 5	21	Gravy	Make the gravy now: cool it completely, freeze it airtight for up to 3 months, then thaw it overnight and whisk it back together on the stove.
☐	Fri Nov 6	20	Cranberry sauce	Cranberry sauce freezes for up to 2 months: cool it, freeze it airtight, then thaw it overnight in the fridge and give it a good stir.
☐	Sat Nov 7	19	Salted caramel apple pie	Assemble the salted caramel apple pie now and freeze it unbaked for up to 3 months, then bake it straight from frozen, adding 10 to 15 minutes.
☐	Sun Nov 8	18	Corn casserole	Corn casserole freezes for up to 2 months once it is baked and completely cooled. Thaw it overnight and reheat it in the oven.
☐	Mon Nov 9	17	Sweet potato pie	Sweet potato pie freezes for up to 2 months wrapped in plastic and foil. Thaw it overnight in the fridge and serve it at room temperature.
☐	Tue Nov 10	16	Cranberry meatballs	Freeze the baked cranberry meatballs and the sauce separately for up to 3 months, then thaw them overnight and reheat them together on the stove.
☐	Wed Nov 11	15	Squash casserole	Southern squash casserole freezes best before baking: assemble it, wrap it in plastic and foil for up to 3 months, thaw it overnight, then bake.
☐	Thu Nov 12	14	Cranberry orange bundt cake	Bake the cranberry orange bundt cake now and freeze it unglazed for up to 3 months. Thaw it at room temperature and add the orange glaze before serving.
☐	Fri Nov 13	13	Acorn squash	Baked acorn squash freezes for up to 2 months: scoop the cooked flesh from the skin, freeze it airtight, and thaw it overnight before reheating.
☐	Sat Nov 14	12	Dinner rolls	Garlic butter dinner rolls freeze for up to 3 months once baked and cooled. Reheat them in the oven and they taste fresh-baked.
☐	Sun Nov 15	11	Cornbread dressing	Cornbread dressing freezes baked or unbaked for up to 3 months. Thaw it overnight and add a splash of broth before reheating so it stays moist.
☐	Mon Nov 16	10	Cranberry walnut bread	Cranberry walnut bread keeps 3 months in the freezer wrapped tightly. Thaw it overnight in the fridge, slice, and breakfast is handled.

Freezer tip: label every container with the dish and the date it went in. Flat freezer bags stack and thaw faster than tubs.

Week 3 and the final stretch

The last bakes, then the jobs that have to happen close to the day.

	Date	Days to go	Make this	How to do it ahead
☐	Tue Nov 17	9	Cranberry cheesecake bars	Cranberry cheesecake bars freeze for up to 3 months wrapped tightly. Defrost them overnight in the fridge for the best texture.
☐	Wed Nov 18	8	Pecan pie bars	Pecan pie bars freeze for up to 3 months, or bake them a day or two ahead, since they taste even better the next day.
☐	Thu Nov 19	7	Turkey breast	Cooking for a small crowd? A lemon herb turkey breast can be seasoned up to 24 hours ahead and is done at 165°F in the thickest part.
☐	Fri Nov 20	6	Cornbread muffins	Cornbread muffins keep 3 days on the counter or longer in the freezer. Warm them at 300°F for about five minutes before serving.
☐	Sat Nov 21	5	Start the turkey thaw	Thaw a frozen turkey in the fridge at 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds, so a 20 pound bird needs 4 to 5 days. Brine only once it is fully thawed, and never past 24 hours.
☐	Sun Nov 22	4	Crockpot mac and cheese	Free up the oven: assemble crockpot mac and cheese in the insert the night before, then start it in the morning and add about 30 minutes.
☐	Mon Nov 23	3	Pumpkin pie	Pumpkin pie keeps up to 3 days in the fridge, so bake it today. Add the whipped cream right before serving so it stays fresh and fluffy.
☐	Tue Nov 24	2	Cranberry punch	Make the spiced cranberry punch base up to two days ahead, add the sparkling part right before serving, and freeze some base into cubes so it never waters down.
☐	Wed Nov 25	1	Herb butter turkey	Butter and season the turkey tonight and leave it uncovered in the fridge so the skin crisps. Tomorrow, rest it 20 to 30 minutes before carving.
☐	Thu Nov 26	TODAY	Stuffed mushrooms	Happy Thanksgiving! Stuff the cranberry brie mushrooms up to 8 hours ahead, then bake them right before guests arrive.

My Thanksgiving planner

Fill this in once, stick it on the fridge.

Guests _____ **Turkey size** _____ **Dinner time** _____

The menu

Shopping list

Thursday notes: what goes in the oven when

Every timing in this plan comes from the recipe's own page on thekitchensaid.com. For the daily countdown videos, follow The Kitchens Aid on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest.