

Taste of tradition for Thanksgiving

There are many ways to add a touch of authenticity to your Thanksgiving table

It's that time of year again, the one marked by two things primarily: football and food.

Few Americans, however, keep tradition with the feast that took place in November of 1621 in Plymouth Village. That celebration, a time out for the Pilgrims who had survived that first winter to give thanks for their harvest and health, did not become a sanctioned American holiday until 1863.

This celebration of thanks and gratitude, according to Mark Kehres, did not always necessarily mean a feast.

"They used the term to refer to any occasion where people set aside time to thank God for the gifts he's given to the community," said Kehres, who is the public programs trainer at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. He is the host of the center's latest webcast in the Constitution Hall Pass series, titled "History of Thanksgiving."

According to Kehres, the early Americans did in fact serve roast turkey at their feast, but roast goose and venison were even bigger facets of the meal. In addition, the settlers' seaside location provided an abundance of seafood for the celebration, namely lobster, codfish and clams.

Perhaps the biggest shock to our idea of

the contemporary Thanksgiving feast is the fact that the settlers did not have cranberries. This meant no cranberry sauce, a staple of most holiday feasts today. More unsettling still, the Pilgrims' lack of sufficient amounts of sugar and flour meant no pies or cakes. Pumpkin and squash were indigenous to the area, however, making pumpkin puddings a viable dessert option.

Authentic American

Traditions and menus may have changed over the centuries, but the City Tavern Restaurant in Philadelphia offers an authentic Thanksgiving dinner in a period-themed atmosphere, complete with costumed servers. Head chef Walter Staib, author of the cookbook "City Tavern: Recipes from the Birthplace of America," did extensive research to ensure his Thanksgiving dishes followed original 18th-century recipes.

Staib claims he keeps his **recipes** as authentic as possible, "short of cooking it in a modern kitchen."

What sets apart City Tavern's Thanksgiving bash from others is the family-style serving, with each table receiving its own turkey and sides.

"We have 10 dining rooms," said Staib, explaining how the limited number of people in each room contributes to the intimate family vibe and, as he put it, "homey feeling."

The building itself, which belongs to the National Park Service, is an exact replica in the exact location of the original restaurant, which opened in 1773 and burned down in 1830. It was reconstructed using blueprints

and old letters, and is identical to the original, “down to the plants that hang on the wall in the dining rooms,” said Staib’s assistant, Molly Yun.

City Tavern’s Thanksgiving Day menu, comprised of four courses, includes an appetizer sampler, Boston Bibb with a signature raspberry shrub vinaigrette, turkey roasted with a sage and marjoram stuffing, classic mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes with apples, creamed green beans and a cranberry relish.

The green beans, according to Staib, mirror the 18th century cooking process in which the beans were dried, soaked in water and served with a cream sauce, in this case a béchamel. The idea of cooking the stuffing under the breast of the turkey came from a 1796 [recipe](#) by Amelia Simmons in her book “American Cookery,” which the folks at City Tavern believe may be the very first reference to basting a turkey before roasting it and serving it with cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes.

Turkey tips

While cooking a turkey may seem a daunting task to some, Brian Goode of Ye Olde Centerton Inn Restaurant in Pittsgrove explains that it does not have to be such a challenge. Goode, who has owned the restaurant for over eight years with wife Joanne, claimed the most crucial tip is to let the turkey rest after it’s done cooking to give the juices time to seep back into the bird, and allow it to “recover.”

Goode said the biggest problem most people have is cooking their bird at too low of a temperature, which is a “recipe

for dry turkey.” He recommends cooking it at a higher temperature and then browning it later on before serving.

The restaurant, which is more than 300 years old, provides the atmosphere of the [period](#) at its annual Thanksgiving dinner. The Goodes opt for the traditional route, offering roasted turkey with all the trimmings, including a homemade Yorkshire pudding and cranberry chutney.

Richard Diemer, head chef at The Gables in Beach Haven, shares a similar philosophy on turkey, claiming the “hard and fast” cooking method produces optimum results.

Diemer stuffs a soft butter and fresh sage mixture under the skin, which creates a layer of flavor between the skin and flesh.

He turns the temperature down after about half an hour and cooks it “low and slow” until the internal temperature reaches about 170 to 180 degrees. He cautioned to always take the turkey’s temperature in the thigh, as it is the last part of the bird to [cook](#).

“I always score the side with a knife,” Diemer said, “It equalizes the cooking time between the breast and leg.”

The Gables offers this turkey along with green beans, a dried cherry and sausage stuffing, fresh cranberry sauce with ginger and tangerines, and ginger maple syrup sweet potato mousse at its Thanksgiving dinner.

Ingredients and recipes have changed since the 1600s, but the day remains a symbol of thanks and celebration of time together with family and friends.

Regardless of what your menu entails, enjoy a day of football, minimize your stress, and remember the origins of the most delicious American holiday.



City Tavern head chef Walter Staib, author of the cookbook 'City Tavern: Recipes from the Birthplace of America,' did extensive research to ensure his Thanksgiving dishes followed original 18th century recipes. / Photo provided

City Tavern Restaurant

138 South 2nd St., at Walnut St
Philadelphia

info@citytavern.com

(215) 413-1443

Lunch served from 11:30 a.m. daily

Dinner served from 4 p.m. Monday-Saturday, from 3 p.m. Sunday

The Gables

212 Centre St., Beach Haven

(609) 492-3553

Dinner served from 5:30-10 p.m.

Ye Olde Centerton Inn

1136 Almond Road

Pittsgrove

(856) 358-3201

Dinner served daily

National Constitution Center

525 Arch St.

Independence Mall

Philadelphia

(215) 409-6600

(215) 409-6700

Museum hours:

Mon.-Fri. 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

Saturday 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Sunday noon-5 p.m.

IF YOU GO