**Showcasing the DNR: Thanksgiving turkey recipes from the DNR**

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It’s time to pull your favorite stretchy pants out of the back of the closet and get the TV ready to watch parades and football games. Thanksgiving Day is almost here, and with that comes delicious food, time with family and friends and great memories to be made.

What’s Thanksgiving dinner without a juicy turkey on the table? From the Michigan Department of Natural Resources family to yours, we’d like to offer some recipes and tips for making the perfect Thanksgiving turkey. From wild turkey appetizers to deep-fried turkey delights, we’ve got you covered for the 2018 holiday season.

“Wild turkey meat is very flavorful and can be used in almost any recipe,” said Al Stewart, DNR Upland Game Bird Specialist. “There is nothing more rewarding than to serve a wild turkey that you harvested for Thanksgiving Day dinner.”

**Wild turkey appetizer**

Maybe you were lucky enough to shoot a wild turkey this fall, or perhaps you still have a bird in the freezer from the spring season that could make a tasty appetizer to serve at your Thanksgiving feast.

Joe Robison, DNR Wildlife Division southeast region supervisor, offers a great recipe for turning a wild bird into a delectable hors d’oeuvre.

“Cut your wild turkey breast into one-quarter or one-half-inch cubes and marinate them overnight in Italian dressing,” Robison said.

The next day, lightly coat the cubes in your favorite breading – Robison likes to use either Young’s or Drake’s batter mix – and lightly fry them in peanut oil. Serve them with a side of ranch or blue cheese dressing or cocktail sauce.

“My daughter Sidney harvested a nice turkey this past spring, and we prepared her turkey this way,” he said. “The whole family enjoyed the fruits of her labor.”

**Oven-roasted turkey**

The most traditional way to cook turkey, whether store-bought or wild, is to roast it in the oven. Two DNR staffers suggest their favorite ways to prepare an oven-roasted turkey.

Starkema Jackson, secretary with the Finance and Operations Division at the DNR’s Detroit Metro Customer Service Center, likes to use a boatload of butter in the preparation of her Thanksgiving turkey.

“I rub the outside of the turkey with butter and then sprinkle that butter layer with plenty of pepper, garlic powder and seasoning salt,” said Jackson. “Then I bake the turkey as directed on the packaging. With all that butter, the skin gets nice and crispy and so, so tasty!”

Jackson also places a stick of butter in the turkey’s body cavity instead of stuffing the bird with dressing. The butter melts down through the meat and adds a delicious rich flavor that her family loves.

Eric Hilliard, digital media specialist for the DNR Wildlife Division, roasts his turkey upside-down.

“We always cook our turkey upside-down so the breast soaks in the juices continually while it cooks,” Hilliard said. “This makes for a juicy, tender bird.”

Hilliard said he also stuffs the turkey with cut lemons and limes to give the turkey a zesty, citrusy flavor.

**Deep-fried turkey**

Perhaps one of the most popular trends in cooking turkey is to deep-fry the bird. Robison is a big fan of this method for his holiday fowl because the crispy skin and deep-fried flavor is a favorite in his family.

Deep-frying is best with a turkey that is fresh or has been completely thawed. While heating the oil in your deep fryer to 375 degrees, pat the turkey dry with paper towels to reduce any excess moisture. Then, season as you like.

“I sprinkle Cajun seasoning on the skin and then drop it carefully in the fryer,” Robison said. “Then I cook it for three and a half minutes per pound.”

When deep-frying, read turkey fryer instructions carefully to prevent fire or injury.

**Carnitas-style turkey**

DNR Saginaw and Bay County wildlife biologist Jeremiah Heise created this recipe and has used both wild turkey and duck to prepare it, though really any meat could be used. This easy slow-cooker recipe makes a delightful turkey taco, burrito or enchilada.

“Carnitas-style turkey can be enjoyed as a replacement in dishes that would normally call for regular carnitas or taco meat – in enchiladas or burritos, on nachos, or in soft or hard taco shells,” said Heise.

Heise likes to serve this turkey dish with salsa verde, sour cream, diced cilantro, green onions and lime wedges.

**Ingredients**

* 2 wild turkey breasts and/or de-boned thigh and leg meat
* 2 12-oz. cans lager beer
  + 3-4 12-oz. cans if using thigh and leg meat
* 1-2 cups low-sodium chicken stock
* 1 large white onion, cut in half and thinly sliced
* 2 red peppers, finely chopped
* 2-3 garlic cloves, smashed
* 4-6 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
* 2 tablespoons ground cumin
* 1 teaspoon black pepper
* 1-1.5 teaspoon salt

\*Liquid in the recipe will be reduced, so it is important to limit the amount of sodium added at the beginning of the cooking process; it is best to season to taste at the end of the cooking process.

**Directions**

1. Place turkey meat in a slow cooker.
2. Add diced onion, chopped red pepper, smashed garlic and spices.
3. Add beer and enough stock to fully cover meat.
4. Place slow cooker on high to bring to boil, then reduce heat to low.
5. Cook four to six hours or until tender.
6. Remove turkey meat and shred.
7. Add all contents, including liquid, to a heavy pot.
8. Place pot on stovetop over medium-high heat to begin evaporating excess liquid.
9. When most of the liquid is evaporated, add olive or vegetable oil and sauté until oil has evenly coated meat and meat has begun to crisp.

Take that tender turkey meat, and wrap it in a taco shell, spread it on nachos, or roll it in an enchilada or burrito and enjoy!

**Grilled turkey**

For a smoky, robust-flavored turkey, consider grilling your turkey breast.

The DNR partners with a program called Gourmet Gone Wild – an outreach program designed to introduce young professionals to hunting and fishing in an innovative way: through tasteful and healthy cuisine.

This program highlights the health benefits of eating wild game while also emphasizing its connection to environmental stewardship, sustainability and conservation.

Gourmet Gone Wild shares its [hickory cider glazed wild turkey recipe](http://www.gourmetgonewild.org/hickory-cider-glazed-wild-turkey/). The glaze takes some time to make, but it really makes this grilled wild turkey recipe special.

We hope we’ve given you some ideas for a great turkey meal this year. From the DNR family to yours, we hope your holiday is truly special, and that you take time to head outdoors this Thanksgiving!

Assuming all that turkey hasn’t put you to sleep, it’s a great time to take a family member or two out for a day of deer hunting or a nice hike on a nearby trail.

[Read a sidebar story](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zcndHTicnfI5Z76ydsbzL9oLe7AktJZ8/view?usp=sharing) about wild turkeys and how the species has made a comeback in Michigan.

Find out more about turkey hunting in Michigan at [michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting).

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [michigan.gov/dnrstories](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.michigan.gov%2Fdnrstories&data=02%7C01%7C%7C903cfdbaa7ba487394b408d6141d788c%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C636718514130661496&sdata=U20ao62kbV%2Fedj3rgGgTm3EA2rfO8hjmbjT4bkWKjqs%3D&reserved=0). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [michigan.gov/dnr](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.michigan.gov%2Fdnr&data=02%7C01%7C%7C903cfdbaa7ba487394b408d6141d788c%7Cd5fb7087377742ad966a892ef47225d1%7C0%7C0%7C636718514130661496&sdata=TMCcnU%2FKDgJ3wtETsavS02wg5uONhGtA9r5za9kGouA%3D&reserved=0).

/**Note to editors:** Contact: [John Pepin](mailto:PepinJ@michigan.gov), Showcasing the DNR series editor, at 906-226-1352. Accompanying photos are available below for download and media use. Suggested captions follow. Credit: Michigan Department of Natural Resources, unless otherwise noted.

[**Carnitas**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110040/Carnitas.jpg)**:** Jeremiah Heise’s carnitas-style turkey makes a terrific tasty turkey taco.

[**Hunter**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110043/Hunter.jpg)**:** Joe Robison and his daughter, Sidney pose with Sidney’s spring turkey. Hunters in Michigan have opportunities to shoot turkeys in the spring and fall.

[**Poster**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110045/Poster.jpg)**:** A painting by Russell Klix was used as poster art to highlight the recovery of wild turkeys in Michigan over 100 years, from 1901 to 2000.

[**Turkey**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110046/Turkey.jpg)**:** Wild turkeys, like these in Mackinac County, have made a highly successful comeback in Michigan and across the country.

**Additional images:** [**Starkema Jackson**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110044/Jackson.jpg), [**Eric Hilliard**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110042/Hilliard%20.jpg) and [**Jeremiah Heise**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110041/Heise.jpg).

**Sidebar photos:**

[**Franklin**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110036/Franklin.jpg)**:** Benjamin Franklin would have preferred the wild turkey over the bald eagle as the national bird. The species has made a significant recovery in Michigan and across the country.

[**Release**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110037/Release.jpg)**:** Releases of wild turkeys in Michigan have aided greatly in efforts to re-establish the species.

[**Turkeys**](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIDNR/2018/11/20/file_attachments/1110038/Turkeys.jpg)**:** Wild turkeys are shown in the eastern Upper Peninsula in Mackinac County.**/**