Braised Turkey

The following recipe is how I cook the dark meat of turkey for Thanksgiving.

• 1 turkey
• 4-5 stalks of celery
• 4-5 carrots
• 2 onions
• 1 bottle dry white wine

General preparation
1. Cut the bird into pieces (thighs, drumsticks, breast with bone still on, wing, backbone).
2. Prepare the breast as you see fit. Since the turkey breast does not have connective tissue, they do not benefit from braising (which breaks the connective tissue down). Because turkey breast can dry out, I typically will either make fried turkey cutlets, or I’ll roast the turkey breast in a covered Dutch oven. Both options are good (flavor is nowhere near as good as the dark meat, though).

Prepare turkey stock
1. Dice 2 celery stalks, 2 carrots, and 1 onion.
2. Fill stock pot with water, place diced celery, carrots, onion, some herbs and a pinch or two of salt, along with turkey backbone and turkey wings.
3. Bring to simmer (not a boil) and cook for 1 hour or so until the turkey is fully cooked. During the process, periodically skim off the foamy crud that raises to the surface.
4. After the turkey is fully cooked, strain the mixture, saving the turkey stock (to be used during the braise). Separate the turkey meat and use for a future soup or turkey salad, etc. Do what you like with the vegetables (these vegetables are bland).

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1. Pre-heat a large pan to medium-high heat
2. Pat the dark meat parts (thighs and drumsticks) dry and season generously with salt and pepper.

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3. Once the pan is hot, add some oil of your choice (I use corn oil) and brown the dark meat. It usually takes 15-20 minutes or so, but it will depend on your pan, the temperature, and if you crowd the pan (don’t do this). Cover the pan with a fry-splatter guard (but don’t cover the pan) and make sure the oven exhaust is running.

4. As the turkey is browning, dice the remaining carrots, celery, and onions.

5. Once the turkey is browned on both sides, remove from pan and place in large braising dish.

6. In the same pan as you browned the turkey (do not clean it), add the celery, carrots, onion, and a couple pinches of salt and soften on medium heat. Scrape the bottom of the pan, making sure you release the brown bits left over from the turkey.

7. Once the vegetables are softened, pour ½ to 1 full bottle of dry white wine into the pan with the vegetables (make sure you do not use cooking wine that has salt added) and make sure you scrape up the brown bits again. Let the wine cook down for 10 minutes or so until it is reduced by half.

8. Arrange the turkey in a large braising dish and pour the vegetables and wine in the dish. Then add the turkey stock to the pan and warm it up. Once it’s warm, pour in the braising dish so that the turkey is partially covered, but not completely covered. I use a small rack in the braising dish, which lifts the turkey off the bottom (so I can fit in more stock).

9. Put into a 325 F oven and cook covered for about an hour. After approximately one hour, flip the turkey and put back in the oven covered for another hour or so. At this stage, you need to periodically monitor the turkey and cook it until it is fork tender, but it typically takes a total of 2 hours or 2.25 hours.

10. Once the turkey is cooked, remove the skin and throw out (the skin is no longer any good).
11. I like to take the turkey meat off the bones, then put the turkey meat in a dish, and pour the braising liquid into the dish so the turkey is completely covered (or if your fridge is big enough you could put the whole braising dish in there). Then refrigerate preferably overnight. What will happen is that the turkey will soak up a lot of the braising liquid making it juicier. The vegetables taste wonderful so save these to eat.

12. Re-heat and use the braising liquid for the sauce. The braising liquid tastes wonderful (I like it better than gravy) because it essentially is twice-braised stock with some acidity from the wine.

I have only tested this on store bought birds so wild turkey may be different (take longer to tenderize).

Submitted by Joe Dahlen, assistant professor of wood quality and forest products; he put this recipe together several years ago for students in his wood properties class that were turkey hunters.