

# Thanksgiving Food Safety: Stuffing Edition

What does your family call it? Dressing or stuffing? No matter what you call it, people are passionate about it. Stuffing can be very personal, and everyone seems to have a favorite way to make it. The options are many. Chestnuts or oysters? Cornbread or white bread?

I'm not going to debate the ingredients. Those are personal decisions and family traditions. Instead, I want to talk food safety.

Most food safety folks agree that, for optimal safety and uniform doneness, stuffing should not be cooked inside the bird. The stuffing is a great place for bacteria to grow. Think about it. Stuffing is wet and warm, and it goes into the deepest part of the turkey, the spot that will take the longest to heat.

If you're cooking stuffing inside the bird, make sure that that stuffing comes to a safe temperature. I'm sorry for the indelicacy, but think about what was in the bird's cavity before you put the stuffing there.

Now if you **MUST** put the stuffing in the bird, there are a few tips that you can try...



- If you're using ingredients like oysters, giblets, or sausage in your stuffing, be sure to **cook them completely** before mixing them with the bread and vegetables. They can still be hot when added to the stuffing and placed inside the turkey, which will help speed the heating time of the stuffing itself.
- **Stuff the turkey loosely.** This tasty goodness needs room to expand. If you have extra stuffing that won't fit in the bird, cook it in a separate casserole dish.
- When testing for doneness, **put a thermometer into the deepest part of the stuffing.** Yes, this goes for stuffing in a casserole dish too. Make sure that the stuffing reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit before you take it out of the oven.
- When reheating leftover stuffing (is there really ever any leftover stuffing?), **use your thermometer again** and make sure that the reheated stuffing reaches 165 degrees F. Don't guess or simply eyeball it. Stuffing is a great place for food-borne illness causing bacteria to multiply and the risk is not worth it.
- **Use leftover stuffing within 2 days.**

Whether you call it dressing or stuffing, it's how you take care of it that's important.

Have a food safe holiday!

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