

THANKSGIVING, HANDLED.

A simple game plan for your first time hosting.

Your job isn't to make everything. Your job is to make Thanksgiving happen.

2-3 WEEKS BEFORE	Set the shape of the day. Decide who's coming, what time you want to eat, and whether this is mostly your meal or a shared one. Choose the menu as a whole. Pick the dishes you actually want to make. Then decide what you'll buy and what guests can contribute. Ask for contributions now. If Aunt Susan makes the stuffing everyone waits for all year, this is her moment.
1 WEEK BEFORE	Make the game plan. Read every recipe all the way through. Note what can be made ahead and what needs last-minute attention. Do the kitchen traffic check. For every dish, mark: OVEN / STOVETOP / COLD / ROOM TEMP / MAKE AHEAD. Confirm guest dishes. Ask whether anything arriving with a guest needs your oven, stove or refrigerator.
2-3 DAYS BEFORE	Shop and prep. Buy groceries, drinks and anything you're outsourcing. Prep what your recipes safely allow ahead of time. Pull out serving pieces. Match a serving dish and utensil to each menu item now - not while the gravy is bubbling. Set up the easy wins. Chill drinks, make space in the refrigerator and get the table pieces together.
THE DAY BEFORE	Do tomorrow a favor. Finish make-ahead dishes, prep ingredients, set the table and put serving pieces where you'll use them. Build tomorrow's cooking order. Work backward from dinner time and give the oven jobs actual slots. Then stop. You do not earn bonus points for finding one more thing to make.
THANKSGIVING DAY	Follow the plan, not your panic. Start with the dishes that take longest and keep your cooking schedule visible. Leave room for arrivals. Know where guest dishes go when they walk in - including anything that needs reheating. Before everyone sits down: pour the signature drink, turn on the music, put out the conversation game, and remember that the people are the point.

THINGS YOU DO NOT NEED TO CARE ABOUT

Making every single thing from scratch. Buying a whole Thanksgiving tablescape. Choosing the most impressive menu. Doing every job yourself. Your Thanksgiving can be beautiful, delicious and special without becoming a production.

YOUR THANKSGIVING COMMAND CENTER

One page for the decisions that keep Thursday from becoming a circus.

DINNER TIME	PEOPLE

I'M MAKING	THEY'RE BRINGING	BUY IT, DON'T MAKE IT

THE KITCHEN TRAFFIC CHECK

Before you fall in love with six dishes that all need the oven at 4:30, give every menu item a home. Include guest dishes that arrive needing heat.

DISH	MAKE AHEAD?	OVEN	STOVE	COLD / ROOM TEMP	WHEN?

DON'T FORGET	BEFORE THEY ARRIVE
	■ Drinks cold & easy to find ■ Bathroom checked ■ Trash emptied ■ Dishwasher empty ■ Serving utensils out ■ Music on ■ Sit down for five minutes

One last thing: Once the food is on the table, your job changes. Eat it. Pour the drink. Talk to your people. Let Aunt Susan accept her annual stuffing compliments.