

I love Thanksgiving. It's my favorite holiday! It's all about family, and gratitude, and food - how can you go wrong? I wanted to share a little Thanksgiving love with you today by sharing some ways to give yourself more grace and de-stress, as well as 3 of my Thanksgiving recipes, and tips for hosting.



Let Go of Unrealistic Expectations

Letting go during Thanksgiving applies whether you are hosting or attending a meal somewhere else. Because we love the traditions, food, and fun of the holiday, we may end up causing ourselves stress with too high of expectations. Let go of your ideas of a magazine-worthy or picture-perfect Thanksgiving this year. That's not the point. Do these things instead and give yourself some grace:

- **Let family be themselves.** Family is never perfect and while you may wish them to all get along beautifully and behave perfectly for one day, something will probably go wrong. Somebody will get on somebody else's nerves. A child will misbehave. Relatives will argue. The more relaxed and casual the atmosphere and the less stressed everybody is, the better the day will go. Go with the flow; shrug it off and love everybody in spite of their flaws.
- **Keep decor and food simple.** If you are hosting or making a dish to take somewhere else, this is not the time to try out a new complicated recipe or replicate a Better Homes & Gardens tablescape if you don't have plenty of extra time. Most of us are very busy and have many other things to worry about, so it's a good idea not to be Martha for the first time on this day. Practice it another time.
- **Accept help.** Doing everything yourself when hosting Thanksgiving is admirable, but overwhelming. People really want to help out! Let others bring part of the meal or help cook. If your guests want to wash some dishes, by all means let them! They appreciate everything you have done and want to bless you. If you're going somewhere else and they don't want you to bring or do anything, be okay with that, too.
- **Take time for you.** Whether it's taking a break on Thanksgiving morning to let somebody else cook or taking the next day "off" to recover and rest, be sure to work in time for yourself. Whether you are hosting or not, there are more people to see and more things to do so you'll need a break and some de-stressing time.
- **Smile.** No matter what happens, be thankful for the blessings (even if they're small things) this Thanksgiving. This is Life. Smile and enjoy it - the good and the not-so-good.

3 Thanksgiving Recipes

I'm sharing 3 recipes that I often serve at Thanksgiving. They are somewhat traditional but with a slight twist. The stuffing is not made in the oven, the vegetables are an alternative to a green bean casserole, and I found a new way to add pumpkin to the dessert table..

Slow Cooker Stuffing

- 1 cup butter, unsalted
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 12 ounces sliced mushrooms
- 12 cups dry bread cubes
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried sage
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon dried marjoram
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2+ cups chicken broth, as needed
- 2 eggs, beaten



Melt butter in skillet over medium heat. Cook onion, celery, mushrooms, and parsley in butter, stirring frequently. When vegetables are tender, season with mixture of poultry seasoning, sage, thyme, marjoram, salt and pepper. Stir to distribute spices.

Spoon cooked and seasoned vegetables over bread cubes in a very large mixing bowl. Pour in enough broth to moisten - just moist, not soggy! - and mix in eggs. Transfer mixture to slow cooker, and cover.

Cook on high for 45 minutes, then reduce heat to low, and cook for 4-6 hours.

Colorful Roasted Vegetables

- 1 lb green beans, trimmed
- 1 lb baby carrots {*about 2 cups*}
- 3 red onions, cut into eighths
- 2 red bell peppers, seeded, cut in strips
- 2 yellow bell peppers, seeded, cut in strips
- 8 sprigs fresh thyme
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika



Place rack in center of oven. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line shallow baking pan with foil.

Cut green beans in half. Combine in large dish *{or on baking pan}* with carrots, onions, peppers, and thyme. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Whisk garlic, olive oil, basil, paprika, salt and pepper together in small bowl. Pour mixture over vegetables. Toss to coat evenly.

Roast in preheated oven for 20 minutes. Use a wide spatula or spoon and carefully turn vegetables. Roast until tender, another 15 to 25 minutes. Sometimes mine take even longer, especially when I do a double batch - I decide when to take them out by how tender the baby carrots are.

Pumpkin Pie Truffles

2 1/2 cups vanilla chips
1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
1/2 cup pumpkin puree
1/2 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
3/4-1 cup graham cracker crumbs
2 cups dark chocolate chips
2 tablespoons oil *{I used coconut oil}*
Ground nutmeg for garnish



Combine vanilla chips and cream in saucepan. Stir over low heat until chips melt completely. Remove from heat. Stir in pumpkin and spice until smooth and blended. Chill mixture in refrigerator for at least an hour. Stir in graham cracker crumbs until mixture is thick enough to roll into balls and hold shape. Roll into 1-inch balls. Place on wax paper. Place pumpkin pie balls in freezer for 15 minutes or so. Reshape slightly if necessary.

Combine dark chocolate chips and oil. Gently heat *{in microwave or in bowl over simmering water on stove}* until chocolate is melted. Dip chilled pumpkin pie balls into melted chocolate and coat thoroughly. Place back on wax paper to set up. Sprinkle tops with nutmeg while still wet, if desired. Store on wax paper in covered container in refrigerator.

10 Tips for Hosting Thanksgiving

I've been hosting Thanksgiving for over 10 years and have learned a few things along the way. You might find a new helpful tip to implement this year!

1. Plan the menu ahead, preferably 2 weeks ahead or more *{which is like...now}*.

Gather up all the recipes you need and start making a shopping list. Check the ingredients in your cupboards - you might remember having an item last year, but perhaps it's expired by now. Why so far ahead? Because if you wait until the last minute to do this and then try to shop, the stores may be out of some of the key ingredients you need. And the crowds. I get a little claustrophobic when I have to shop and can't even make it through an aisle filled with carts and people.

2. Look again at the menu you created.

If you are anything like me, you just need to cross one dish off of there right now. I have a tendency to overdo it and then end up having to eliminate something at the last minute because I run out of time. Also, if there is too much food then people get full quickly and we end up with way too many leftovers or one dish that's hardly been touched.

3. Schedule out the menu.

What does that mean? You need to figure out how long it takes to make each dish and when it needs to be ready. You also need to know what can be made ahead and what can't. Work backwards from the time that you want to eat and figure out when you need to start each item. I usually start preparing some things a couple of days ahead.

4. Be flexible about what time you need to eat.

If you really need to eat by a certain time, then plan for everything to be ready an hour before that since something always ends up taking longer than you expect. I've learned to stop giving an expected meal time. I give a general idea and tell everybody to just come early to hang out and visit while we finish cooking.

5. Decide whether you want to serve the meal to everybody at the table or serve it buffet style.

Either way is just as delicious! But decide now as this will determine if you need to bring out extra tables or configure your room differently. Even if I serve the meal at the table, I usually set up a small table to set some of the food on after it's been passed around as it won't all fit on the main table.

6. Set the table(s) ahead of time - even the day before.

Not only will it look pretty, but it will save you that step as you are scrambling to get all the food ready at once. Of course, if you have lots of kiddos around with nothing to do, then maybe that can be their job! But don't stress about table setting - do what works for you and your family - even paper plates!

7. If you have appetizers during the day, keep them light!

You don't want everybody feeling full before they ever get to the table to enjoy the meal that's been so lovingly prepared. I used to use the opportunity to try new appetizer recipes, but then realized it was just too much. Now I let my guests bring the appetizers and just ask for veggies, chips & dip/salsa. Simple and light, but something to snack on in case the meal is taking waaay longer than anticipated.

8. Let others bring some of the food.

Don't try to do the whole meal yourself. Let people help you! I do have a caution if you have out-of-town guests though. If you ask them to bring an important part of the meal and they have to cancel at the last minute, you might have a problem. Or you might ask them to bring something like the mashed potatoes and they might show up with a bag of potatoes and want to make them start to finish in your kitchen *{and there is no room for that.}*

9. Purchase disposable containers so you can send some leftovers home with your guests.

Maybe you have too much turkey and stuffing left - that can be lunch for somebody. Maybe somebody was too full for dessert or has to leave early - send a selection of dessert items home with them for later. My guests consist mainly of single guys, so I often double up on the food and send enough leftovers home with each one to make one or two meals.

10. Take notes!

You'll want to remember everything for next year or your next hosted meal *{and if you're like me you'll forget even though you are certain that you will remember}*. Write down your menu, table setting, timing, what worked or what didn't, what didn't get eaten, etc. This will help you do it even better the next time around!

Have a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving, friends!

