

*Thought you knew every way to cook a turkey? Think again, says Moorings Chef Michael Lander.*

## A NEW TASTE FOR THANKSGIVING

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*Chef Michael Lander's perfectly brined and roasted turkey.*

What can we say about cooking a turkey on the feast of Thanksgiving that hasn't already been said? Well, not much. But we can revisit the basics, and add some extra twists that might give your traditional holiday menu a delicious new perspective.

Giving thanks for a bountiful harvest dates back to the ancient Greeks, Romans and Chinese. However, our Thanksgiving bird is an American original – or North American to be more exact, since some say that Mexico was the first country to domesticate the turkey. And when

the conquistadores realized what a culinary treat the turkey was, they carried one tom and five hens on each ship returning to Spain so that Europeans could breed and enjoy the New World fowl.

The commercial turkey industry has prospered in this country for the past 50 years, and two generations of Americans likely have no recollection of their customary Thanksgiving turkey other than the frozen variety that takes up valuable space in the refrigerator days before the holiday.

However, turkey connoisseurs say that a fresh turkey,



*Poultry farmer Linda Hart is surrounded by Heritage Breed turkeys on her Crazy Hart Ranch in Fellsmere.*

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with none of the flavor injected into the meat, beats the frozen version in any taste test. Fortunately, fresh turkeys are readily available at local supermarkets. In addition, pastured turkeys can be ordered for the holidays from the Crazy Hart Ranch in Fellsmere. The five-acre farm, owned and operated by Linda Hart, is the only licensed pastured poultry producer in Florida.

Michael Lander, Executive Chef at The Moorings Club, is unequivocal when it comes to his choice. “I prefer fresh turkeys. I like to know where my food comes from and that is the bottom line for me. I have developed a relationship with my suppliers, whether they are local or in other regions of the country, and I know the animals are treated humanely throughout the process.” When it comes to taste, he says, the difference between a fresh and frozen turkey is significant.

“Because of the homogenization of the American pallet, everyone is accustomed to a turkey that has been injected with saline or whatever else the producers use. But if someone who has only tasted a mass-produced, broad-breast turkey were given both to try, he or she would notice the difference right away. A fresh turkey, produced by someone like Linda that has had nothing added to it, has what I would call a very clean taste.”

Hart’s turkeys are Heritage Breed turkeys with smaller breasts, longer legs and bigger wings, “because they actually fly,” she says. Their breeding makes them naturally moist and flavorful.

A moist turkey is what every cook hopes to achieve but often fails, ending up with dry meat. Because white meat cooks faster than dark meat, Chef Lander explains, the breast meat could dry out before the

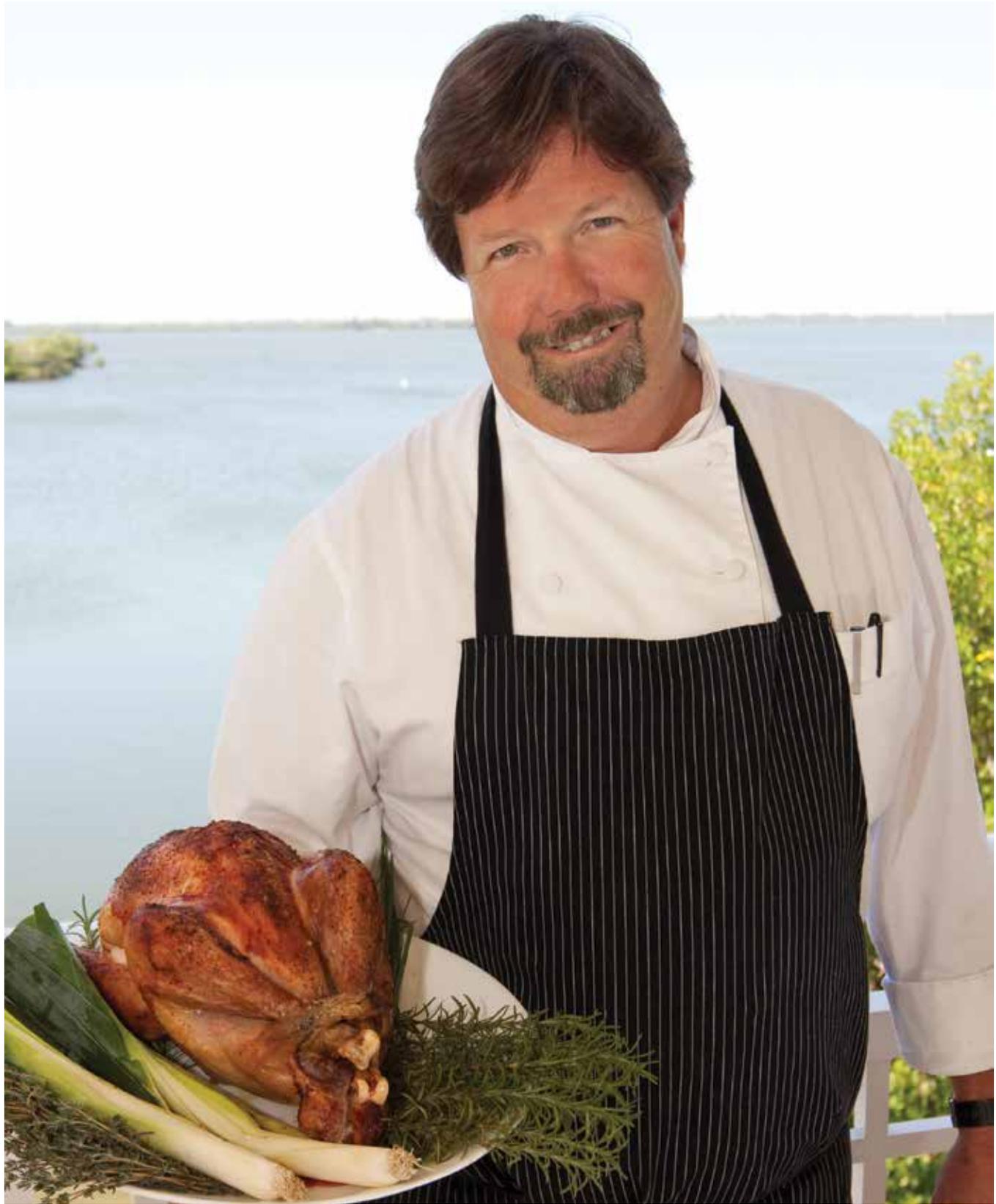


*Chef Lander's favorite roasting tip for a moist turkey is to start out with the breast down for the first hour and then turn it to complete the roasting.*

## Brine for Turkey

- 24 cups water
- 1 cup kosher salt
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon honey
- 18 bay leaves
- 30 unpeeled garlic cloves, smashed
- 3 tablespoons black peppercorns
- 5 large fresh rosemary sprigs
- 1½ bunches fresh thyme
- 1½ bunches fresh Italian parsley
- 2 tablespoons finely grated lemon peel
- ¾ cup fresh lemon juice

Bring all ingredients to a boil. Boil for one minute, stirring to dissolve the salt. Cool completely, chill until cold. Rinse turkey; add to brine, pressing to submerge. Chill for at least 12 hours, but no more than 24 hours.



*Michael Lander, Executive Chef of The Moorings Club, serves only fresh turkey.*



*Tom turkeys on the Crazy Hart Ranch.*

thickest part of the thigh is fully cooked. So to solve the problem of dryness, besides constant and vigilant basting during the roasting process, he suggests brining the turkey.

Brining is accomplished by immersing the turkey in salted water, which is done the night before cooking. Quite simply, it is salt's natural ability to draw out a food's true flavors and juices that ensures a turkey will retain its moisture during any cooking method.

Chef Lander recommends using kosher salt because it is natural and does not contain iodine. His brining recipe also features some fresh herbs, honey and fresh lemon juice. It is the same recipe that he uses at The Moorings Club to brine not only turkeys, but chickens, as well. For a turkey, he adds, be sure to use a stockpot large enough to cover the bird. And whether you brine or not, Chef Lander offers a favorite roasting tip for a moist turkey:

start out with the breast down for the first hour and then turn it to complete the roasting.

The Moorings chef, who has been at the club for the past 10 years, is originally from Atlanta. He apprenticed under famed European Master Chef Paul Albrecht in conjunction with the American Culinary Federation. However, his Southern roots make him an ideal person to consult on a very Southern way of cooking a turkey: deep frying.

Deep fat frying a turkey is a method that most likely started in Louisiana, he says. In his own recipe he uses Cajun spices to season the turkey. "Deep frying is a good way to cook a turkey because it seals the outside immediately. And the end result is a very moist turkey." It is also a lot faster than the traditional roasting method: at 3½ minutes per pound, a 12-pound bird cooks in only 42 minutes.

## Smoked Turkey

- 1 12-pound turkey, neck and giblets removed
- Charcoal briquettes of your choice
- A blend of hickory and oak or other wood chips of your choice

Soak wood chips in water.

Rinse turkey well and dry with kitchen towels.

Light the coals as you normally would for a smoker. Wait until the internal temperature of the smoker comes down to about 250 degrees. Place chips on to coals one to two handfuls at a time. Place turkey on top grate and cover. Leave the lid on because removing it allows the heat to escape and will prolong the cooking time. Tend the coals/wood chips every hour and a half. After 5 hours remove lid and check the internal temperature by placing a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh. Look for a reading of 165-170 degrees.

## Deep Fried Turkey

- 3 gallons peanut oil
- 1 12-pound turkey, neck and giblets removed

In a large stockpot put enough oil to cover the turkey one and a half times, heat oil to 400 degrees. Make sure that you are in a safe place if there is an accidental spillover. Layer a large platter with food-safe paper bags to place the turkey once it is cooked.

Rinse the turkey with water and thoroughly dry with kitchen towels. Season the turkey well inside and out with Paul Prudhomme Cajun Seasoning. Make sure that the hole at the neck is open so the oil can easily pass through the turkey.

Slowly lower the turkey into the pot neck first. Once the turkey is frying, maintain a temperature of 350 degrees and cook for 3½ minutes per pound.

Carefully remove the turkey from the oil, letting it drain before placing it on the large platter. Check the internal temperature by placing a meat thermometer into the thickest part of the thigh. Look for a reading of 165-170 degrees.

*When frying a turkey, the right level of oil is important because of the potential for fire. "People have burned down their houses," says Fellsmere poultry farmer Linda Hart.*

Linda Hart, who is originally from Texas, is also a fan of deep fried turkey. She offers a few practical tips for the cooking process: "I usually put a limit of 14 pounds for a commercial turkey. A Heritage turkey has longer legs, and as long as they will fit into your fryer, you can go up to a 16- to 18-pound bird." She also advises that the cooking time for a Heritage turkey may be less than for a commercially produced bird. To be sure, use a meat thermometer and cook until it reaches 165 degrees.

If you are not sure how much oil you will need, Linda suggests a trial method. "Put your turkey in your flyer and add water to cover it completely. Remove the bird and then mark the level of the water. That will be the level to where you will add your oil."

The right level of oil is important because of the potential for a fire if the hot oil spills over.

"Do not do this indoors," she cautions. "People have burned down their houses. Put your fryer on your driveway where it is level and stable and not on your lawn where the ground is soft and your flyer might tip over."

Peanut oil is the preferred oil for deep frying, but if someone in the household is allergic to peanuts, substitute another type of oil with a high smoke point, such as canola or sunflower oil. After use, the oil can be strained and saved for the next time you fry.

Chef Lander offers yet another alternative to the standard roasted turkey – smoked turkey. If you have the time – the cooking time for a 12-pound turkey is around 5 hours – this method will certainly give you a flavorful option for your holiday main course. And because of the longer cooking time, brining the turkey before smoking is often a good idea.

Of course, deep fat frying and smoking requires the additional equipment of a fryer or smoker – both available at local retailers. However, no matter what cooking method you prefer, a meat thermometer is a must.

A good thermometer can be purchased for as little as \$10-\$12. Higher-priced versions are available, and some can be programmed to alert a cook – through a remote device – when the food has reached its optimal temperature. All types are available locally and make great holiday gifts. ❁