

When I was very small, I remember watching with fascination, as Mom & Dad would put the turkey in the sink, and proceed to stuff it full of the mixture they'd cooked earlier that morning. They'd skewer it closed, stretching the skin to fit. Hefting the bird into a roaster that we never used for anything else, it would then be put in the oven. This would all happen before lunch, as it would take hours for the bird to roast. As soon as it was in the oven, Dad would drive off to go pick up Grandma to spend the holiday with us. The smell of the herb-laden stuffing would fragrantly scent the house all day.

As we grew, we took on a bit more of the holiday cooking each year, learning to simply make dinner, perhaps with a quick glance at the well-thumbed Joy of Cooking, but usually just following what Mom did, which was probably essentially the same as her mom did, and her mom before that.

Although I now buy a bag of coarse breadcrumbs, when growing up we never did. Slightly stale crusts and bits of bread would be kept until there was enough to either break apart to make a coarse crumb, or put folded into a tea towel to be rolled and crushed into fine crumbs. Today our bread trimmings tend to go to the chickens with their morning feed.

As stuffing is a bit of this and a bit of that, I needed to narrow it down to the essentials for the recipe; herbs, vegetables, a bit of fruit, egg, a bit of liquid, and sometimes the treat of oysters, and dry breadcrumb. This is essentially how I make it year after year, sometimes adding something in just to switch it up.

Traditional Poultry Stuffing

Enough for a 14-18# bird or as a side dish for 10.

Ingredients

½ c butter
2 onions, diced
2 celery ribs, chopped fairly small
1 large apple, peeled, cored & chopped
big handful of fresh parsley, coarsely chopped.
1 t salt
½ t pepper
1 ½ T dried rubbed sage
½ T dried thyme
½ T dried marjoram
½ T dried rosemary (crumbled)
½ t nutmeg
300-gr/10½ oz bag of coarse dried breadcrumbs
1 c apple juice or chicken stock
2 eggs
2 tins smoked oysters (optional)

Direction

In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter until frothy.

Add in the chopped onions, celery, apple and parsley.

Cook until the onions are slightly translucent, and the celery is fork tender, about 8 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Add in the salt, pepper, and herbs.

Continue cooking for another couple of minutes.

Take off the heat.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the juice or stock with the eggs.
Put the breadcrumbs into a large bowl.
Add in the contents from the skillet, being sure to scrape out all the buttery bits.
Add in two tins of oysters with any liquid.
Mix well, until uniform. It's okay if the oysters break up a bit.
Pour the egg mixture over top, and stir thoroughly.
The mixture should be moistened, but not soggy.
At this point, you can either stuff the bird immediately, ready for roasting, or cover the stuffing mixture ready for stuffing the bird within the next 24 hours. Do not pre-stuff the bird. Let the stuffing rest at room temperature for an hour before stuffing the bird if making it ahead.
Alternately, the mixture can be put into a lightly greased baking dish, dotted with about 1 tablespoon of butter, covered with a small piece of foil that just covers the top of the stuffing and pressed right close to the stuffing itself. Then cover the dish with foil pressed down around the edges. The small piece of foil helps to keep the stuffing moist. Cook the stuffing in a 350° oven for 45 minutes. Again, this stuffing can be made up to 24 hours ahead, covering with foil, oven-ready. If doing ahead, let the covered stuffing sit at room temperature for an hour before cooking.

Optional add-ins:

1 c chopped mushrooms or
½ c diced dried apricots or
½ c dried cranberries or
½ c Pine nuts

Option: replace dried herbs with 3 level tablespoons poultry seasoning mix.

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