

THE THANKSGIVING *game plan*

A SMALL-GATHERING MENU · SERVES ABOUT 6

An easy roast chicken dinner with a complete menu, shopping list, and make-ahead schedule



A NOTE FROM SARAH

Hi friend,

"Simplifying the menu was only half of it. The other half is having a plan."

I grew up in a big family, so Thanksgiving always meant a million kids and cousins running around, more aunts and uncles than I could count, and a table so full of food you could barely see the tablecloth.

These days, our Thanksgiving celebrations are a little smaller. With family spread out and fewer people around the table, we've simplified things over the years — and I've come to really appreciate a more relaxed holiday.

That's where this menu comes in. Instead of a big turkey, we're making an herb-roasted chicken (so much easier to manage, and honestly, I like it better anyway!), along with some of our favorite Thanksgiving sides. There's sweet potato casserole and Brussels sprouts, of course, plus a few newer favorites like maple-glazed carrots and a pear and arugula salad.

Simplifying the menu was only half of it, though. The other half is having a plan, so you can actually enjoy the day instead of racing between the oven and the stove. So I've mapped it all out for you: what to buy and when, what to make ahead, an hour-by-hour timeline for the big day, and a few easy ideas for setting a simple, pretty table.

Pour yourself something nice and let's get cooking.

Sarah



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Print the shopping list, follow the make-ahead plan during the week, and keep the Thanksgiving Day timeline handy on the big day.

the menu

SERVES ABOUT 6

Every recipe in this guide has been sized to serve at least 6 people. Feeding big eaters or want plenty of leftovers? Roast a second chicken in its own pan alongside the first, and go by the thermometer for both. If you make a recipe from the blog instead, just double-check the quantity to make sure it's enough for your crowd.

THE MAIN

Herb Roasted Chicken With Garlic Herb Butter

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/HERB-ROASTED-CHICKEN

THE DESSERT

No Bake Mini Pumpkin Pie in a Cup

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/EASY-NO-BAKE-MINI-PUMPKIN-PIE-IN-A-CUP

THE SIDES

Old Fashioned Sweet Potato Casserole

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/OLD-FASHIONED-SWEET-POTATO-CASSEROLE

Maple Glazed Carrots

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/MAPLE-GLAZED-CARROTS

Maple Bacon Brussels Sprouts

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/MAPLE-BACON-BRUSSEL-SPROUTS-PAN-FRIED

Cheesy Crescent Roll Garlic Knots With Parmesan

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/CHEESY-CRESCENT-ROLL-GARLIC-KNOTS-WITH-PARMESAN-EASY

Pear, Arugula, and Goat Cheese Salad

FRONTRANGEFED.COM/PEAR-ARUGULA-AND-GOAT-CHEESE-SALAD

WHY THIS MENU WORKS

With the Brussels sprouts on the stovetop, the salad ready in minutes, and the carrots and dessert made ahead, there's a lot less competing for oven space on Thanksgiving Day.

SHOPPING LIST

Everything you need for the whole menu, split into two quick trips. Pick up pantry staples and ingredients that keep well over the weekend. Save the fresh ingredients for Monday.

trip one THE WEEKEND BEFORE

MEAT AND DAIRY

- [ ] 1/2 lb standard-cut bacon
- [ ] 1 lb unsalted butter (4 sticks)
- [ ] Whole milk (1/4 cup)
- [ ] 3 eggs
- [ ] Shredded mozzarella (1/2 cup)
- [ ] Shredded Parmesan (1 cup)
- [ ] Crumbled goat cheese (3/4 cup)
- [ ] 2 tubes (8 oz each) crescent roll dough

PRODUCE

- [ ] 3 lb carrots
- [ ] 5 large sweet potatoes
- [ ] 2 yellow onions
- [ ] 2 heads garlic
- [ ] Orange juice (a splash)

PANTRY

- [ ] Kosher salt and black pepper
- [ ] Pure maple syrup (about 1/2 cup)
- [ ] Extra virgin olive oil
- [ ] Low-sodium chicken broth or stock
- [ ] Brown sugar, light (3 tbsp) and dark (1/2 cup)
- [ ] Granulated sugar
- [ ] Ground cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg
- [ ] Vanilla extract
- [ ] Crushed red pepper (optional)
- [ ] 1 package unflavored gelatin
- [ ] 1 can (15 oz) pumpkin puree
- [ ] Graham crackers (enough for 2 cups of crumbs)
- [ ] Mini marshmallows (1 to 2 cups)
- [ ] Pecans (1 cup), plus walnuts or more pecans for the salad (1/3 cup)
- [ ] Dried cranberries or cherries (1/3 cup)
- [ ] Balsamic vinegar
- [ ] Raspberry preserves

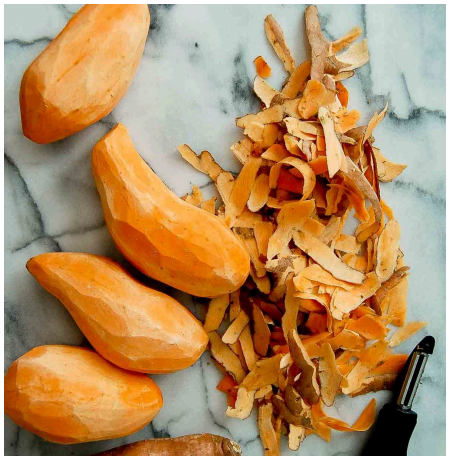
DON'T FORGET

- [ ] Kitchen twine
- [ ] An instant-read thermometer
- [ ] 12 small (4 oz) jars or cups for the pumpkin pie cups

trip two MONDAY

- [ ] 1 whole chicken (4.5 to 5 lb). You'll dry brine it on Wednesday.
- [ ] Fresh thyme, rosemary, sage, parsley, and basil
- [ ] 1 1/2 lb Brussels sprouts
- [ ] 6 cups fresh arugula
- [ ] 3 pears (buy them a little firm, and they'll ripen on the counter by Thursday)
- [ ] 2 lemons
- [ ] Heavy cream (1 cup), plus whipped cream for serving

Using a frozen chicken? Move it to the fridge by Saturday. It needs about a day in the fridge for every 4 to 5 pounds to thaw, plus time to dry brine.





THE WEEK BEFORE

WHAT TO MAKE AHEAD

saturday or sunday

- ☐ Shopping trip #1 (see the shopping list on page 4). Check that your instant-read thermometer and kitchen twine are on hand.

monday

- ☐ Shopping trip #2: the chicken, fresh herbs and delicate produce.

monday or tuesday

- ☐ Make the garlic herb butter for the chicken. It keeps in the fridge for up to 5 days. (Make a double batch and use the extra on rolls and sides!)
- ☐ Make the salad dressing. It keeps in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.

tuesday or wednesday

- ☐ Make the sweet potato casserole base. Mash, mix, and spread it in your baking dish, then cover and refrigerate. Don't bake it yet. The base keeps for up to 3 days.
- ☐ Mix the pecan topping and refrigerate.
- ☐ Toast the nuts for the salad.

wednesday

- ☐ Dry brine the chicken. Pat it very dry, salt it all over, and refrigerate it uncovered on a rack overnight. This is the secret to that addictive crackly skin.
- ☐ Make the pumpkin pie cups. They need at least 2 hours in the fridge and hold for up to 24 hours. (Save the whipped cream for right before serving.)
- ☐ Trim and halve the Brussels sprouts and chop the bacon.
- ☐ Roast the maple glazed carrots, let them cool, and refrigerate. They keep for up to a day ahead, and you'll just warm them up tomorrow.
- ☐ Set the table. Future you will be so grateful.



THE BIG DAY

THANKSGIVING DAY

DINNER AT ABOUT 4:00

Eating later? Move the schedule forward by the same amount of time. The chicken is done when the thermometer says so, not when the clock does, so this plan builds in about 30 minutes of wiggle room.

12:15	Take the sweet potato casserole out of the fridge. Heat the oven to 350°F.
12:30	Bake the sweet potato casserole base for 25 minutes. (Straight from the fridge, it may need a few extra minutes.) Set it aside. The toppings go on later.
1:00	Turn the oven up to 425°F. Take the chicken out of the fridge to sit for 30 minutes, and set the herb butter out to soften.
1:30	Butter the chicken under and over the skin, stuff the cavity with lemon, garlic, and herbs, tie the legs, and set it on the onion rounds with the broth.
1:45	Chicken goes in. Roast about 1 hour 15 minutes, basting once or twice near the end.
2:30	Make the garlic knots and keep them in the fridge on the baking sheet until it's time to bake. Take the carrots out of the fridge.
2:45	Start checking the chicken's temperature. It's done when the breast reads 160 to 165°F and the thigh reads 175°F, usually somewhere between 3:00 and 3:30.
WHEN THE CHICKEN COMES OUT	Tent it loosely with foil and let it rest. Lower the oven to 350°F. (Cracking the door for a minute helps it cool faster.) Add the marshmallow and pecan toppings to the sweet potato casserole.
ABOUT 10 MINUTES LATER	Sweet potato casserole and garlic knots go in for about 15 minutes, until the marshmallows are toasty and the knots are golden. Slide the carrots in for the last few minutes to warm through. Start the Brussels sprouts on the stovetop. They take about 20 minutes.
ABOUT 25 MINUTES AFTER THE CHICKEN COMES OUT	Carve the chicken and spoon the pan juices over the top. Toss the salad. Brush the garlic knots with the rest of the garlic butter, and drizzle the maple syrup over the Brussels sprouts.
	dinner!
AFTER DINNER	Whip the cream, top the pumpkin pie cups, and serve.



HERB ROASTED CHICKEN WITH GARLIC HERB BUTTER

SERVES 6 · ROAST AT 425°F, ABOUT 1 HOUR 15 MINUTES

- 1 whole chicken (4.5 to 5 lb), giblets removed
- 2 tsp kosher salt, for the dry brine
- 1 lemon, zested and then halved
- 1 head garlic, halved crosswise
- A few sprigs fresh thyme and rosemary
- 2 yellow onions, cut into thick rounds
- 1/2 cup low-sodium chicken broth

HERB BUTTER

- 6 tbsp softened unsalted butter
- 3 grated garlic cloves
- 1 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
- 2 tsp chopped rosemary
- 1 tbsp chopped sage
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley
- the lemon zest
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

01 The day before, pat the chicken very dry, salt it all over, and refrigerate it uncovered on a rack.

02 Heat the oven to 425°F. Mash the herb butter ingredients together. Push two-thirds of the butter under the skin and rub the rest on the outside.

03 Stuff the cavity with the lemon, garlic, and herb sprigs. Tie the legs and set the chicken on the onion rounds in a skillet or roasting pan. Pour in the broth.

04 Roast about 1 hour 15 minutes, basting near the end, until the breast reads 160 to 165°F and the thigh reads 175°F.

05 Rest 15 minutes, carve, and spoon the pan juices over the top.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/HERB-ROASTED-CHICKEN



love your leftovers

Leftover chicken keeps in the fridge for up to 4 days. Use it cold in salads and sandwiches, or swap it in for the rotisserie chicken in my Rotisserie Chicken Banh Mi Sandwiches (frontrangefed.com/weeknight-chicken-banh-mi). It's also great in place of the turkey in my Leftover Turkey Cranberry Sliders With Hawaiian Rolls (frontrangefed.com/leftover-turkey-cranberry-sliders-with-hawaiian-rolls).

Expert tip: Save the bones! Simmer the carcass with water, an onion, carrots, and celery for an easy homemade chicken stock.

Leftover sweet potato casserole keeps in the fridge for 4 to 5 days.



MAPLE GLAZED CARROTS

SERVES 8 · ROAST AT 400°F, 20 TO 25 MINUTES

- 3 lb carrots, peeled and cut on the diagonal (or baby carrots)
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 6 tbsp pure maple syrup
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp chopped fresh parsley

01 Heat the oven to 400°F and line two baking sheets with foil.

02 In a large bowl, stir together the maple syrup, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Add the carrots and toss to coat.

03 Spread the carrots in a single layer on both sheets and roast 20 to 25 minutes, until tender and caramelized at the edges.

04 Top with parsley and serve. *Make ahead: roast up to a day ahead, refrigerate, and warm before serving.*

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/MAPLE-GLAZED-CARROTS



MAPLE BACON BRUSSELS SPROUTS

SERVES 8 · STOVETOP, ABOUT 20 MINUTES

- 1 1/2 lb Brussels sprouts, halved
- 1/2 lb standard-cut bacon, chopped
- 1 tbsp pure maple syrup
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/2 tsp crushed red pepper (optional)

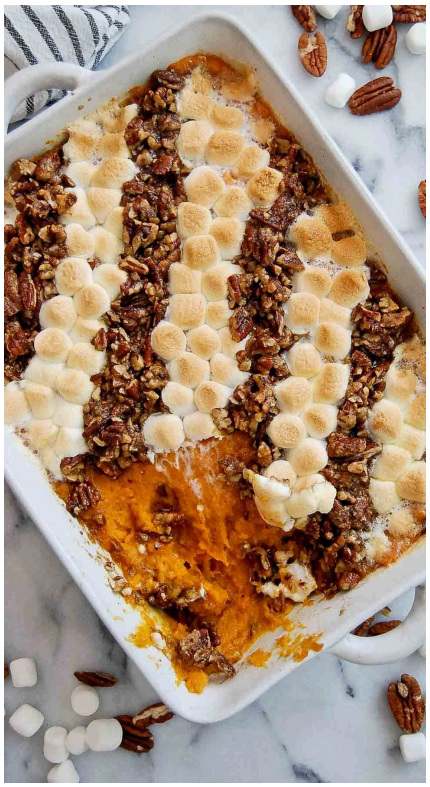
01 Cook the bacon in a large skillet over medium heat until browned. Scoop it out with a slotted spoon, leaving about 1 tablespoon of fat in the pan.

02 Add the Brussels sprouts cut side down and cook, without stirring, about 6 minutes until browned.

03 Season with salt and pepper, stir, and cook 5 to 10 minutes more.

04 Off the heat, stir in the bacon (and red pepper, if using), drizzle with maple syrup, and toss. Serve right away.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/MAPLE-BACON-BRUSSEL-SPROUTS-PAN-FRIED



OLD FASHIONED SWEET POTATO CASSEROLE

SERVES 12 · BAKE AT 350°F, ABOUT 40 MINUTES

- 5 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1/4 cup whole milk
- A splash of orange juice
- 3 tbsp brown sugar
- 5 tbsp unsalted butter, softened
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 1 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp salt

TOPPING

- 1 cup finely chopped pecans
- 3 tbsp softened unsalted butter
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- 1 to 2 cups mini marshmallows

01 Boil the sweet potatoes 15 to 20 minutes, until soft. Drain and mash.

02 Beat in the milk, orange juice, brown sugar, butter, egg, cinnamon, vanilla, and salt until smooth. Spread in a greased 2 1/2 to 3 quart baking dish. *Make ahead: stop here, cover, and refrigerate for up to 3 days.*

03 Bake uncovered at 350°F for 25 minutes.

04 Mix the pecans, butter, and dark brown sugar. Top the casserole with stripes of marshmallows and pecan topping.

05 Bake 10 to 15 minutes more, until the marshmallows are toasty.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/OLD-FASHIONED-SWEET-POTATO-CASSEROLE



PEAR, ARUGULA, AND GOAT CHEESE SALAD

SERVES 6 · 10 MINUTES

- 6 cups fresh arugula
- 3 ripe pears, thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup crumbled goat cheese
- 1/3 cup chopped walnuts or pecans
- 1/3 cup dried cranberries or cherries

DRESSING

- 4 1/2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 1/2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp raspberry preserves

01 Whisk together the balsamic vinegar, olive oil, and raspberry preserves.

02 Toast the nuts in a dry skillet over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, until fragrant.

03 Toss the arugula with the dressing, nuts, and cranberries. Top with the pears and goat cheese and serve right away.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/PEAR-ARUGULA-AND-GOAT-CHEESE-SALAD



CHEESY CRESCENT ROLL GARLIC KNOTS

MAKES 16 · BAKE AT 350°F, ABOUT 15 MINUTES

- 2 tubes (8 oz each) crescent roll dough
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp each chopped fresh parsley and basil
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella
- 1 cup shredded Parmesan
- Salt, to taste

01 Heat the oven to 350°F and line a baking sheet with parchment. Melt the butter with the garlic over low heat for 1 to 2 minutes.

02 Unroll the dough into rectangles and cut each in half lengthwise for 16 strips.

03 Brush the strips with garlic butter and sprinkle with herbs and cheese. Roll each strip into a tube and tie it into a knot.

04 Bake about 15 minutes, until golden. Brush with the rest of the garlic butter and sprinkle with a little extra Parmesan, herbs, and salt.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/CHEESY-CRESCENT-ROLL-GARLIC-KNOTS-WITH-PARMESAN-EASY



NO BAKE MINI PUMPKIN PIE IN A CUP

MAKES 12 · CHILL AT LEAST 2 HOURS

CRUST

- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 5 tbsp melted butter

FILLING

- 1 package unflavored gelatin
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 2 eggs (beaten)
- 1 can (15 oz) pumpkin puree
- Whipped cream, for serving
- 12 small (4 oz) jars or cups

01 Stir the graham cracker crumbs and melted butter together.

02 In a heavy saucepan, combine the gelatin, spices, and salt. Stir in the cream, sugar, and eggs. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, about 10 minutes until the gelatin dissolves and it thickens.

03 Take it off the heat and stir in the pumpkin.

04 Press the crumbs into the cups, top with the filling, cover, and chill at least 2 hours (or up to 24).

05 Top with whipped cream right before serving.

FULL RECIPE → FRONTRANGEFED.COM/EASY-NO-BAKE-MINI-PUMPKIN-PIE-IN-A-CUP



SETTING THE TABLE

A SIMPLE THANKSGIVING TABLE

You don't need a lot to make the table feel special. Greenery, candles, and a simple runner do just the trick.

START WITH A RUNNER

A plain linen or cotton runner down the center of the table is all the base you need. Neutral colors let the food and greenery shine.

LIGHT SOME CANDLES

Mix taper and pillar candles in a few different heights for a warm glow. Unscented candles are best at the table so they don't compete with the food.

A FEW FINISHING TOUCHES

— Set a few pears or small pumpkins along the runner.
— Tie a sprig of rosemary to each napkin with a bit of twine.
— Set the table on Wednesday night so it's one less thing on Thursday.

ADD GREENERY

Lay loose greenery right down the runner. Eucalyptus, magnolia leaves, or cedar all look lovely. Tuck in a few extra rosemary and sage sprigs from the chicken for a little tie-in to the menu (and they smell great).

KEEP IT LOW

Keep everything low enough that you can see each other across the table.

Thank you for cooking with me this Thanksgiving. If you make this menu, I'd love to hear how it went. Reply to any of my emails or tag me @frontrangefed on Instagram.

Sarah

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