

Mastering Turkey Gravy

Here's how to take the guesswork (and the lumps) out of America's favorite pan sauce—and produce perfect gravy every time. BY SEAN LAWLER

The turkey is carved, the potatoes are mashed, the family is starving—now is not the time to be hovering over the stove, fussing like a mad scientist with bulb basters and tiny bottles of suspicious brown liquid. But with so many items on the menu for holiday dinners, busy cooks often neglect the gravy until the last minute. Is it any wonder that it turns out lumpy, pasty, and pale? But gravy need not cause so much stress. In fact, much of the work can (and should) be done ahead of time.

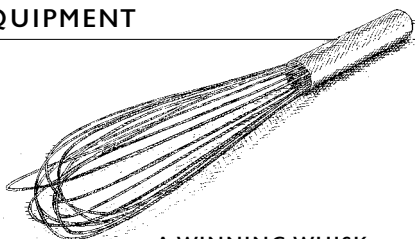
EQUIPMENT

Sauce Whisks

Asking a balloon whisk to reach into the “corners” of a pan is usually a stretch. To find out what sort of whisk would be better suited to making sauces, such as gravy (page 17), we rounded up 12 models in various shapes and sizes. We prepared gravy, béchamel, and a steak pan sauce with each whisk.

Many of the more unusual whisks did a good job—but they could do only one job. Square-headed whisks reached into the right angles of pots, but they were awkward when used for anything else. Coil-type whisks deglazed pans with aplomb, but they couldn't handle much volume and were easily clogged by thicker sauces. We settled on a “skinny” balloon whisk as the best choice for sauces. Shape is key here. The tight radius of the tines can dig a roux out of the corner of a pan. The long, relatively straight wires can even scrape a sauce from the sides of a pan. When tilted on its side, this whisk covers a wide swath of pan for efficient deglazing. We recommend a whisk measuring between 10 and 12 inches—too long to be lost to the bottom of a Dutch oven but too short to tilt out of most small pans. Some flexibility is necessary, so avoid a whisk with very stiff wires.

We found five whisks that met these criteria. Our favorite was the Best Manufacturers 12-Inch Standard French Whip (\$9.95). This long whisk boasts an agile set of tines and a comfortable handle that is light enough to keep this whisk from tipping out of shorter saucepans. — Garth Clingingsmith

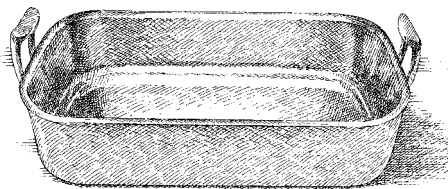


A WINNING WHISK
This whisk is our favorite for making everything from turkey gravy to béchamel.

Roasting Pans

BEST ROASTING PAN

A roasting pan with a heavy bottom is a must when deglazing, which is done over stovetop burners. We've tested nearly a dozen, and our two favorites are made by All-Clad. The Petit Roti is fine for a small turkey, whereas the larger Roti is necessary for a turkey that weighs more than 12 pounds.



BEST ROASTING PAN
The All-Clad roasting pan is our top choice for turkey and more.

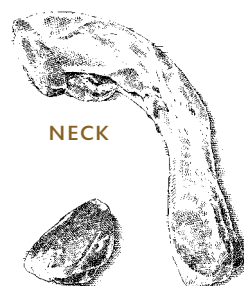
DISPOSABLE ROASTING PAN

A disposable foil roasting pan is fine for catching flavorful turkey drippings, but it can't be put on the stovetop to deglaze. If using a disposable foil roasting pan, just strain and defat the pan drippings and add them to the gravy to taste.

INGREDIENTS

What's in That Bag?

No need to fear that mysterious little bag that comes inside the turkey cavity—it contains the makings for a flavorful gravy. The turkey neck and the “giblets,” or internal organs, are mechanically separated, washed, and then repackaged during turkey processing precisely for the purpose of making gravy. Here's what's in the bag:



NECK

HEART



GIZZARD



LIVER

NECK

The *neck* is the large, elongated muscle with a bone through the center. It contains some very flavorful meat. Cut it into several pieces for easy browning, then simmer it in the broth. Discard after straining the broth.

GIBLETS (HEART, GIZZARD, AND LIVER)

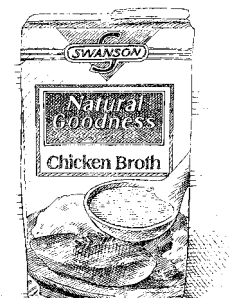
The *heart* is the small, oblong, dark-colored organ. Brown it along with the neck and gizzard, then simmer it in the broth. Reserve after straining the broth, then dice and return to the gravy before serving.

The *gizzard* is the reddish, spherical organ. It is a grinding organ from the bird's digestive tract, recognizable by a butterfly-shaped strip of connective tissue. Cut the gizzard in half, brown it along with the heart and neck, then reserve it after straining the broth. Dice the gizzard and return it to the gravy along with the heart.

The *liver* is the soft, brownish, flat organ. Because the liver tends to impart a characteristically strong flavor, we don't recommend using it to make gravy.

Broth: Watch Out for Salt

Because making gravy involves simmering, which concentrates flavors, it's important to tread lightly with salt. That includes using a low-sodium chicken broth. In fact, we recommend cutting the commercial broth with water to reduce the overall salt level of the gravy. (A 2:1 ratio of broth to water works best.) After sampling a dozen leading brands of chicken broth, tasters found broths from Swanson to be the best. Broth sold in aseptic packages undergoes less heating than broth sold in cans, and we found that the former tastes better.



BEST CHICKEN BROTH
Swanson Natural Goodness

Thickener: Flour, Not Cornstarch, Means No More Lumps

Cornstarch is notorious for clumping when added to a hot liquid. And once it does clump, all the whisking in the world won't smooth things out. This is why we recommend thickening gravy with a roux (made with flour and butter). As long as you add liquid to the roux in small increments, lumps will not be a problem.

MAKING THE GRAVY

BEST TURKEY GRAVY

MAKES ABOUT 6 CUPS

This recipe makes enough gravy to accompany a 12- to 14-pound turkey, with leftovers. If you are roasting a very large bird and want to double the recipe, prepare the gravy in a Dutch oven. White wine adds a welcome note of acidity to gravy, but in a pinch you can use more chicken broth in its place.

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- Reserved turkey giblets and neck
- 1 onion, unpeeled and chopped
- 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 2 cups water
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 8 parsley stems
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup dry white wine
- Table salt and ground black pepper

STEP ONE: Make the broth.

TIMETABLE: 1 to 2 days in advance.

STEP TWO: Make the roux and thicken the broth.

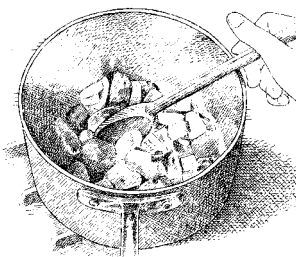
TIMETABLE: 1 day in advance or while turkey roasts.

STEP THREE: Deglaze the roasting pan and add the drippings to the gravy.

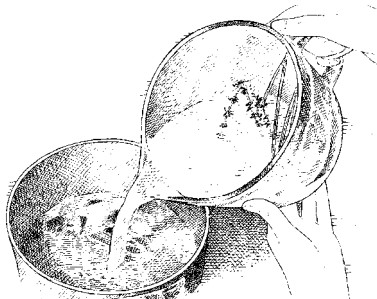
TIMETABLE: While the turkey rests on the carving board.

STEP ONE Make the broth

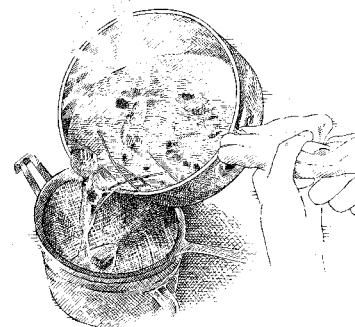
Good gravy starts with turkey stock, but few home cooks have the time to make homemade. With turkey trimmings and an onion, you can quickly doctor store-bought chicken broth into a flavorful base for gravy.



1. Sauté and sweat. Heat oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Brown turkey giblets and neck for 5 minutes. Cook onion for 3 minutes. Cover and cook over low heat for 20 minutes.



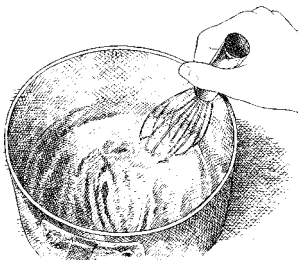
2. Simmer and skim. Add chicken broth and water, scrape pan bottom, and bring to boil. Add herbs and simmer, skimming foam from surface, for 30 minutes.



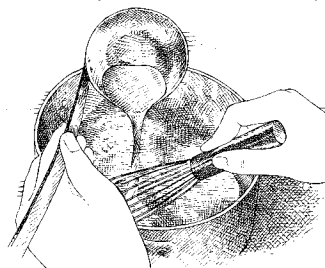
3. Strain and cool. Pour broth through fine-mesh strainer. Reserve and dice heart and gizzard. Refrigerate broth and diced giblets until ready to use.

STEP TWO Make the roux and thicken the broth

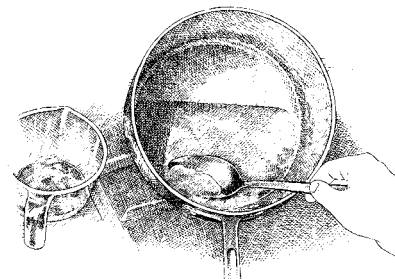
A nutty brown roux (made with butter and flour) thickens and flavors the turkey broth. The roux also adds deep brown color, so you won't need artificial gravy helpers, such as Gravy Master or Kitchen Bouquet.



4. Cook roux. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium-low heat. Whisk in flour. Cook, stirring constantly, until nutty brown and fragrant, 10 to 15 minutes. Bring reserved turkey broth to simmer.



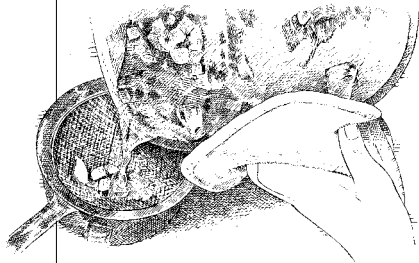
5. Add broth. Gradually add hot turkey broth to roux. Vigorous and constant whisking at this point is key to avoiding lumps. Reserve 1 cup of broth for deglazing roasting pan (see #9).



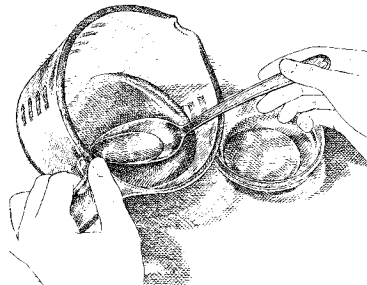
6. Simmer gravy. Simmer gravy, stirring occasionally and skimming scum from surface with spoon, until thickened, about 30 minutes. Set aside, covered, until turkey is done.

STEP THREE Deglaze the pan and add the drippings to the gravy

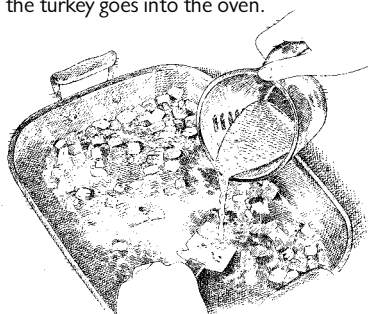
Browned vegetables and drippings in the roasting pan used to cook the turkey are the final flavor enhancers for gravy. Add 1 cup each of chopped onions, carrots, and celery along with fresh thyme sprigs and 1 cup of water to the roasting pan before the turkey goes into the oven.



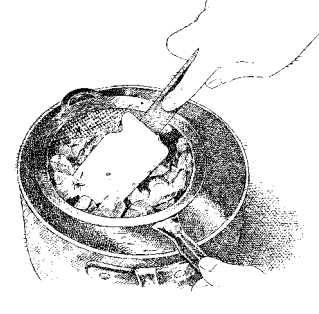
7. Strain drippings. Pour drippings through mesh strainer set over measuring cup. Let liquid settle until fat rises to top. Return vegetables in strainer to roasting pan.



8. Defat drippings. Tilt measuring cup and use wide, shallow soup spoon to skim fat off surface. Reserve defatted drippings. Return gravy in saucepan to simmer.



9. Deglaze pan. Place roasting pan over two burners at medium-high heat. Add wine and reserved 1 cup broth and scrape up browned bits in pan. Boil until liquid reduces by half, 5 minutes.



10. Finish gravy. Strain roasting pan liquid into gravy, pressing on solids to extract all liquid. Add defatted drippings to taste. Stir in giblets and serve.