



Turkey with Whiskey Brine & Glaze



An exceptional turkey recipe inspired by a signature Tennessee whiskey.

About This Recipe

We've brined turkeys for years because they enhance the flavor and juiciness of the meat. This year we decided to develop a brine and glaze using Jack Daniel's® Tennessee Whiskey. Everyone who feasted on the turkey (including us) labeled it as a success.

Most brine recipes recommend that a fresh bird should be used and to avoid kosher or injected turkeys because the meat will be too salty after brining. A fresh turkey can cost \$4 per pound or more, so you can expect to spend around \$55 for a 13 lb bird. For this recipe we decided to test a 13 lb grocery store brand frozen young turkey for \$1.49 per pound with a cost of \$20. The label states, "Contains up to 8% of a solution of turkey broth, salt, sodium phosphates, flavorings (extract of pepper & celery)".

We served the turkey to family and friends and asked for their comments. Everyone loved the flavor and juiciness of the meat. Then we asked them if it tasted salty no one said they noticed. Two of members of my family avoid salt and while they said they could taste the salt it wasn't overly salty to them.

The turkey was thawed by placing it in a 5 gallon bucket with a liner, then we filled the bucket with cold water. We waited 5 hours, then placed it on a roasting pan with a rack in the refrigerator while the brine was being made.

We did not expose the whiskey to the heat of the brine or the glaze, so the alcohol content was present, however any alcohol will evaporate during the cooking process.

You can brine a turkey for 6 hours or up to 2 days. We brined the maximum of 2 days. We also brined the neck and giblets, which ended up having a very strong brine flavor. In the future, we'll either add them the night before removing the turkey or not at all.

If you choose not to brine your turkey, the glaze in this recipe is very simple and it adds great flavor to the skin and exterior of the meat, not mention the wonderful color for the presentation. The photo above is the actual turkey used in this recipe.

Servings: 10-12

Prep Time: 2 hours

Total Cooking Time: 3-6 hours depending on the size and cooking method

Brine Ingredients

- 1 whole turkey (12-14 pounds)
- 1 gallon water
- 1 bucket ice
- 2 cups kosher sea salt
- 2 cups dark brown sugar
- 2 cups of Jack Daniel's® Tennessee Whiskey
- 2 oranges (sliced into 8 segments each with peel on)
- 2 white onions (sliced into 8 segments each with skin peeled off)
- 2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns
- 6 fresh sage leaves

Glaze Ingredients

- 1/2 cup Jack Daniel's® Tennessee Whiskey
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 orange (squeezed) or substitute with 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1/2 stick butter

Brine Instructions

1. Thaw the turkey and remove the neck and giblets from the main cavity and neck cavity. Rinse thoroughly inside and out and pat dry. Refrigerate in a roasting pan with a rack.
2. In an 8-quart pot or larger add one gallon of water, 2 cups kosher sea salt and 2 cups of brown sugar. On medium heat, stir the mixture until most of the salt and sugar are dissolved.
3. Add the oranges, onions, peppercorns, and sage leaves. Stir the ingredients occasionally and bring to a boil, then turn off the heat, cover and allow to steep for one hour.
4. Add ice and stir mixture to melt the ice until the mixture is cold to the touch. Add whiskey and stir mixture.
5. Place the turkey, neck and giblets (optional-see introductory story) in a brine bag or 5-gallon bucket with a food safe liner. Pour the brine in until it fully covers the turkey. Add extra water if needed. Move the turkey around in the brine to remove any air that is trapped in the cavity.
6. Place the brining turkey in a refrigerator or cooler with ice (make sure the turkey remains at 40°F (4.4°C) or below). The turkey can be brined overnight or up to 2 days. Rotate the turkey 180° once a day to ensure that the turkey is evenly brined.
7. Remove the turkey from the brine the day before you plan to cook it, pat the skin dry, place it on a roaster rack and pan to allow it to drain and refrigerate it uncovered overnight. This will allow the skin to dry to promote a crispy skin. Discard the brine mixture.

Glaze Instructions

1. In a sauce pan on low heat, melt the butter, then slowly whisk in the honey and fresh orange juice until the mixture is bubbling mildly. Be careful not to scorch it.
2. Remove from the heat, allow to cool a few minutes, then whisk in the whiskey. Set aside.

Cooking Instructions

Depending on the cooking temperature you can roast or smoke the turkey. Cooking times will vary and you can estimate the roasting time at 325°F (163°C) at 15 minutes per pound and the smoking time at 250°F (121°C) at 25 minutes per pound. For example, the 13 lb turkey we used will have an estimated roasting time of 3 hours and 15 minutes, while smoking the same size turkey at will take at least 5 hours and 25 minutes.

For either cooking method you should cook the bird by internal temperature, not by the estimated time. Cook the turkey until the thickest part of the thigh reaches an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) using an instant-read or remote thermometer. Some prefer to pull the turkey off the grill at 160°F (71°C) knowing that the turkey will continue to cook while it is resting, and to lower the risk of overcooking the breast meat.

1. Set up the grill for indirect cooking and heat it to your preferred temperature.
2. Pin the wing tips to the breast with toothpicks to keep the wing tips from blackening. Alternately, you can fold them behind the back. Trim off the excess skin around the neck cavity or stretch the skin and pin it with a few toothpicks. Truss the legs with butcher's string for a nice presentation.
3. There will not be a lot of drippings from the turkey, but you may want to catch the glaze as it drips off the bird. We placed an aluminum foil pan between the heat deflector plates and cooking grates.
4. To promote a uniformly browned turkey we place the turkey on a roasting rack, then place it directly on the cooking grates.
5. Baste the turkey with the glaze mixture every 30 minutes until it is fully cooked.
6. To prevent the skin from getting too dark you can tent it loosely with aluminum foil at any point during the cooking time. We didn't need to do this.
7. To cook the neck and giblets, place them in a small pan or iron skillet and pour enough glaze in the pan to cover half of the pieces. If you don't have enough room in the grill you can place them directly on the cooking grates. They will be done well before the turkey, so check them for doneness when glazing the turkey.
8. When the thickest part of the turkey thigh reaches an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C), remove the turkey from the grill and allow the turkey to rest on a platter for 20 minutes before carving. It is popular to tent the turkey loosely with aluminum foil to allow some air circulation while the turkey is resting, but we did not see the need to do it.