

thanksgiving your way



recipes, traditions, and decorating ideas  
for your thanksgiving holiday

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## About

Thanksgiving has always been one of my favorite holidays.

Spending time with friends and family. Just being together. Reflecting on our blessings.

I know it can be stressful if you're the one preparing the feast or hosting the dinner in your home, though, and the goal of this ebook is to help you plan your Thanksgiving so that it's the kind of celebration you want. That may mean a new family tradition, a new recipe or a scaled-back meal plan.

Because I am an admitted kitchen dunce, I knew I couldn't put this ebook together on my own, so I've partnered with more than 15 bloggers to highlight their recipes, traditions and decorating ideas. You're sure to find a recipe or idea that inspires you within these pages, and I hope you'll spend some time visiting the contributor's sites as well!

Be sure to print out some of the free planning pages linked at the end to help you organize and plan your Thanksgiving celebration!

Mandi Ehman  
[Life...Your Way](http://yourway.net)

# Countdown to a Stress-Free Thanksgiving

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and [Olmanson Photography](#), a daily contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the editor of the [food channel](#) for Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found in one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

*Originally posted on [Food Your Way](#):*

Whether it's your first time hosting Thanksgiving or you're a seasoned veteran, it's no secret that success is found through preparedness and organization. The key is to start planning early so you have everything under control and don't end up with a Griswold-like turkey dinner. Here is a list to get you started on what you should be considering getting done from now right up to Turkey Day.

## **2-3 Weeks Before:**

Plan your menu and make a grocery list. Knowing what you're eating and what you need to purchase will ensure that nothing is forgotten or ingredients aren't missing when you go to whip together your sweet potato casserole. It also allows you to watch for sales and clip coupons and watch for deals as you get closer to Turkey Day.

Test any new recipes. If you're thinking of trying something new and different this Thanksgiving, consider giving it a test drive in your weekly menu now so you can avoid any last-minute kitchen mishaps.

Assign tasks to your guests. Maybe you're a household that splits the cooking duties between the arriving guests so everyone brings a dish to share, potluck style. Even if that's not you, consider asking guests to take care of something that requires less effort like bringing a bottle of wine, apple cider or an appetizer. They could also be responsible for bringing a favorite holiday movie or a board game to share.

Order your turkey. Whether you're looking to buy fresh or frozen, don't wait until the last minute. Figure out what you want and where it's coming from and get that one in the bag.

## **2-4 Days Before:**

Thaw your turkey. Get your frozen turkey thawing in the fridge so that it's ready to go when you need it. Yes, it really will need all four days to thaw in the fridge.

Grocery shop. You can buy nonperishable items at any time, but check to see what's left on your list and get it all so you aren't fighting the last-minute crowds at the register.

Bake and cook anything you can in advance. Cranberry sauces, pie crusts, cheesecakes can all be made in advance and stored in the fridge.

Consider day-of storage options. Chances are you won't have enough room in the fridge for all the food and beverages as they're waiting to be placed on the table or popped in the oven. Get your coolers ready and stock up on ice so that you have it on hand when you need it.

**1 Day Before:**

Prep your casseroles. Even if you aren't planning on baking them until the day of, you can prepare most casseroles and store in the fridge uncooked until ready to bake. If necessary, store toppings in a separate container. When it's time to bake, just pull them out, top and into the oven they go.

Bake pies and desserts. Get the major baking out of the way and off your plate long before it comes time to stuff the turkey. It will free up much-needed space on the counter, the sink and in the dishwasher.

Create your cooking schedule. Look at what you have that needs to occupy the oven, at what temperatures and for how long. Create a list that lets you know when things need to be in and out so that they'll all be ready to go on time.

Clean your house. Do all of the major cleaning the day before so you aren't running around with a mop bucket and an oven mitt as you try to juggle cleaning and cooking at the same time.

Make breakfast for Thanksgiving. Have a do-ahead breakfast ready to go so that you aren't making dishes and cooking on the morning of. Consider baking a coffee cake or muffins and fruit. You could even treat yourself to a breakfast out or visit the local bakery for fresh donuts.

**Thanksgiving Day:**

Roast your turkey. The centerpiece of a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, give yourself plenty of time to prep the turkey and allow extra time at the end of the cooking time so you can carve and make gravy from the drippings.

Use your cooking schedule. The schedule you made will keep you from frantically trying to remember which casserole and dish needs to go into the oven when. Keep it posted in a spot where it's easy to refer to often.

Get rid of the kids. If you can, consider sending the kids out to a parade or to the park with your significant other to get them out of the house, leaving you to cook and do any final cleaning and organizing.

Enjoy the day. Remember that Thanksgiving is a day of gratitude and to give thanks for all that you have.

**Visit [Food for My Family](http://yourway.net) for more tips and recipes.**

## The Importance of Family Traditions

Sherri is a work-at-home mom to two young boys and has been married to her high school sweetheart, Gwynn, for 13 years. Read more from Sherri at [Serene Journey](#), where she shares simple tips to enjoy life, and at [Zen Family Habits](#), where she talks about all things family.

*Originally posted on [Simple Mom](#).*

Traditions. Those little rituals passed down from generation to generation that help shape your family by creating a sense of unity, warmth and closeness. They create memories that fill your mind with peace, love, happiness, and security.

But what do you do if your family doesn't have many traditions? Well, you create them of course! Somebody has to create all these little rituals, so why not let it be you?

Traditions don't have to be extravagant, intense or require a lot of planning. They can be as simple as reading to your child every night in the same comfy chair, having a movie and pizza night every Friday or discussing things you are grateful for around the dinner table each Thanksgiving.

Traditions are the glue that keeps a family together. We all have very busy lifestyles, and adding a small tradition here or there can make all the difference to your family.

**Visit [Serene Journey](#) for more simple tips for enjoying life.**

# The Importance of New Traditions for Blended Families

Susan Heid is passionately committed to helping moms make small changes managing their homes & families to give them more time, order and less stress. Her tenacious spirit, no nonsense approach, and generous heart fuels her passion to empower moms in their most important role, which she does at [The Confident Mom](http://TheConfidentMom.com).

Perhaps the most difficult, or at least one of the most difficult times, for blended families are the holidays. You have such unique circumstances, one of ex-husbands, ex-wives, multiple sets of grandparents, step-children and step-siblings which can result in a recipe for disaster if you are not intentional and careful with planning. This can be incredibly stressful and full of up and down emotions.

I know, I have experienced it all.

I am a mom, once single-mom, now step-mom and foster-mom who has traveled this road perhaps just a little bit before and have learned some important lessons on how blending a family can be very different from starting from scratch in the traditional way. A newly married couple must navigate their first holiday season together - making decisions about where time will be split, who's house you will be at for Thanksgiving and where you will wake up on Christmas morning, but add in the element of children to the equation and the task is *daunting*!

If you let it break you down, it will – but I have come with some helpful suggestions for you to create new traditions and new memories as a blended family.

Depending on the age of your children when you remarry will depend on what and how you determine your path for your “new” family. With younger children I think it can be a little easier, older children surely have more opinions, emotions and experience having the holidays a certain way. No one likes change, but change is good and kids are resilient and life does go on!

I have been married a little over 3 years now and at the time of writing we have three biological children in our home, which can change any day since we are also foster parents. We decided it was critical to include some of our traditions we held close to our hearts which we did before we were married as well as create new ones that we can call ‘our own’. It is not realistic to think your husband and his child will give up all their “normal” ways of sharing in the holiday season for what you and your children did – it just doesn’t work that way.

We had dated for over a year before we got married so our two families were already familiar with how we spent our holidays, which was really helpful. But once we were married we gathered all the kids up and sat down to talk about what we could/would do to start our own traditions as a new family. I would love to share with you some of my discoveries:

## 1) Get the big picture

You cannot expect that your spouse will drop all their traditions for yours. So try making a list of all the different activities and ways that you celebrate special occasions and then homes at the same time for Christmas dessert, or can you? If you each have a favorite place to cut the Christmas tree, how can you make that work – or do you? How does your family normally celebrate birthdays? Small, family celebrations or large, rambunctious parties? By creating this big list initially you will have a jumping off point to have a great discussion.

## **2) There has to be give and take**

If your children are old enough, include them in as many decisions as possible. If they are small include them in a few, or give them a choice between option A and B. For our family, my husband decided to give up his tradition of where & how they got their Christmas tree and adopted my family's tradition, which is now "**our**" new tradition. As in any new relationship you have to make compromises or someone suffers. Be open and discuss how important some traditions are and where you would be willing to compromise. Speak from your heart and be honest. Allow older children to be heard as well and validated. They are giving up too.

## **3) Be Flexible**

As I said before, no one likes change, but change can be a good thing. You cannot have one side of the 'before married' family dictating how the 'new family' will proceed. It just cannot work – resentment will set in. You must be open to taking on new traditions that may seem foreign and be willing to make them your own. Encourage your children to be flexible and open to new ideas and changes. It is extremely important to show a positive attitude, even when you may not be as "excited" about a new way of celebrating. You never know, it may grow on you!

**An example,** I married a great guy who can be rather silly at times. Now, my kids and I had started the tradition of making a gingerbread house each Christmas season as a family. It was great, very thought-out and well-planned. I purchased just the 'right' candy to make it a splendid "Martha Stewart" masterpiece! Well in comes my silly, by the seat of his pants hubby who decides to use all kinds of weird candy, letting the kids each make their own "masterpiece" and then on Christmas afternoon they take the houses outside and blow them up with firecrackers! I was mortified – but you know what, we have boys and they love this. They talk about this for months prior to it arriving! So, I let my personal feelings slide and let them enjoy their- oh I mean "**our**" new tradition with gingerbread houses!

## **4) Create some new traditions**

Be careful to include NEW traditions in your family. Don't just take some of yours and some of his and throw them together. It is extremely important to come up with new ideas in order to create the kind of unity your family needs. Maybe you can start to attend a certain play during the holiday season or go caroling? Something that neither of your family's have done before, making it unique to your "new" unit. This connectedness is what will keep you going when things get tough. If you are always referring to "what we used to do" or "when we did this before you were married" you can end up really separating your family rather than uniting it.

## **5) Be willing to share**

The bottom line when you have a blended family is that more often than not you will NOT be together for all the holidays all the time. It is a true-hard fact. By making the best with the situation you have and not allowing your frustration to flow over to your kids you will be creating an easier time for your children. I can guarantee that your kids don't want to be caught up in all that, so try your best to hold your own personal thoughts at bay. When it is time to drop them off Christmas afternoon at your ex's, do so with a smile and wish them a good time. Isn't that what you know they would truly want from you?

Holidays are hard for a lot of families for many different reasons, but blended families are unique and always have unusual circumstances. It is like making a new version of a recipe that you have made for years, except the store no longer carries one ingredient so you have to use your creativity and imagination to move ahead and do so with grace and compassion.

**Visit [The Confident Mom](http://yourway.net) for more strategies for strengthening your family.**

# Thawing a Turkey

Jen Tilley has an insatiable appetite for all things related to baking and cooking. She is the author, photographer and recipe developer on [How To: Simplify](#), a blog that shares tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen. She enjoys sharing recipes that require very few ingredients and only a small amount of prep and cook time, all of which make time spent in the kitchen simple and enjoyable.

*Originally posted on [How To: Simplify](#).*

Unfortunately, you can't just run to the store the morning of Thanksgiving, buy a frozen turkey and immediately throw it in the roasting pan in the oven. Why, you ask? Because by the time the bird will finally be ready to eat, everyone will be tucked into beds...dreaming of the turkey they should have eaten that day.



## Thawing a Turkey in the Refrigerator

Once you are ready to begin thawing the turkey, take the bird out of the freezer and place in a pan, keeping the packaging wrap in place. Leave the bird in the refrigerator for approximately 24 hours for each 5 pounds of turkey. Allow larger turkeys to stand for a maximum of 5 days in the refrigerator. If you want to expedite the thawing process, be sure to remove the packaged giblets and neck from the cavity of the bird towards the end of the thawing process.

## Thawing a Turkey in Cold Water

Place the sealed turkey in a leak proof package or zipper-seal plastic bag. This will prevent bacteria from being introduced into the meat and it also prevents the bird from absorbing water. The turkey should remain in cold water for approximately 30 minutes per pound and it's always best to change the cold water every 30 minutes of thawing. After thawing in cold water, immediately begin cooking the turkey.

## Thawing a Turkey in the Microwave

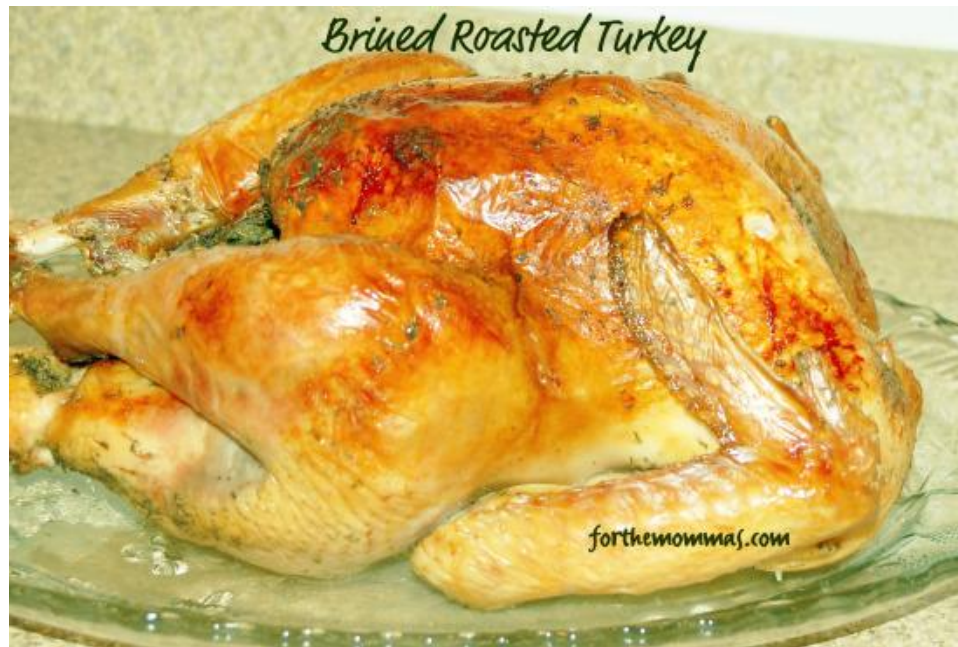
This is a method I don't highly recommend but if you insist on thawing in this fashion, be sure to remove the bird from all of its packaging and then read the manufacturer's instructions on size, minutes per pound and power level for thawing. I also want to advise you to never use the microwave to cook a whole, stuffed bird. Poultry bones and the stuffing will prevent even and thorough cooking.

**Visit [How To: Simplify](#) for more tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen!**

# Brining & Roasting Your Turkey

Shannon is a mom, blogger, and self-proclaimed "Recessionista". She spent thirteen years in corporate accounting and management before launching [ForTheMommamas.com](http://ForTheMommamas.com), an entertaining and helpful website, designed to make shopping and saving money simple.

Originally posted on For the Mommas in [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#):



*If you haven't cooked with a brine before, you are missing out! It's easy and delish.*

- 2 gallons cold water
  - 10 ounces of Kikkoman Natural Brewed Soy
  - 1/2 cup Kosher Salt
  - 1/2 cup Sugar
  - 2 tablespoons dried sage
  - 2 tablespoons dried celery seed
  - 1 tablespoon of dried thyme
  - 16 -24 lb Turkey
1. The night before you are ready to roast, clean and rinse the turkey (like you normally would).
  2. Mix water and all the ingredients except the turkey in a large stock pot.
  3. Place the turkey in the brine.
  4. Cover the turkey and place in refrigerator overnight or at least 8 hours.

5. Remove your brine and rinse well.

6. Place turkey in shallow roasting pan at least 2 inches deep. Heat the oven to 350. Brush turkey with vegetable oil or butter to prevent drying. If you have a meat thermometer, insert into thickest part of thigh.

7. Loosely cover turkey with a tent of foil. DO NOT wrap the turkey tightly. For the last half hour, remove foil. Roast at 325-350 degrees until the thermometer reads 180-185 degrees. I like to baste the turkey with its juices once an hour.

8. Let your turkey sit 20 minutes before you cut it.

### **Roasting Time Guidelines**

*Remember every oven's temperature is different, so these are just guidelines; you will want to make sure your turkey is cooked through.*

- 8-12 lbs. :: 3-3.5 hours
- 12-14 lbs. :: 3.5-4 hours
- 14-18 lbs. :: 4-4.25 hours
- 18-20 lbs. :: 4.25-4.75 hours
- 20-24 lbs. :: 4.75-5.25 hours

**Visit [For the Mommas](#) to find great values for your family!**

# Carving a Turkey

*Adapted from [allrecipes.com](http://allrecipes.com).*

Be sure to use a sharp carving or chef's knife, the longer the better.

1. Start by removing the thighs and drumsticks. To do this, pull each drumstick away from the bird and disconnect the thigh bone from the body with a knife.
2. Next, follow the same steps to remove the wings so that the breast is fully exposed for carving.
3. To carve your turkey, lay it on its back, breast-side up. Make a long, horizontal cut at the base of the breast. Make your cut as close to the bone as possible.
4. Slice the breast from the top down, cutting at a slight angle away from the carcass. Because you made the horizontal cut first, the slices will be easy to separate as you go.
5. Next carve the drumsticks. Start by holding it by the end and slicing off one side. Turn it so the flat side is on the cutting board and slice off the next side. Continue turning a quarter at a time until you've sliced it all.
6. To carve the thighs make even slices parallel to the bone.
7. Arrange all of the meat on a platter and serve!

## Three No-Bake Thanksgiving Appetizers

With a love of cooking, baking, decorating, and serving, Cheri is a self-learning culinary blogger. [Kitchen Simplicity](#) is an upbeat, encouraging food blog focused on simple, family-friendly foods. Each recipe is accompanied by beautiful, simple photos to illustrate the steps and final product.

Originally posted on [Kitchen Simplicity](#).



### **Creamy Pumpkin Pie Dip**

*This pumpkin dip is cool and creamy with a hint of those spicy fall flavors we all love so much. I served mine with Cinnamon Almond Crisps.*

- 1 (250g/8oz) pkg. cream cheese
- 1 cup pumpkin pie filling
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 cup sour cream

1. Cream together room temperature cream cheese and pie filling until smooth. Stir in cinnamon, ginger, vanilla and sour cream. Refrigerate 2 hours before serving.

2. Serve with graham crackers, ginger snaps, cinnamon cookies or fruit such as apples and pears.

Makes: 2 cups

*Note: If using plain pumpkin puree ADD: 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon, 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger, 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves, 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg (or: 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice). PLUS: 3/4 cup icing sugar.*

## Smoked Salmon Pinwheels

*This is such a quick and easy recipe to throw together but they look so elegant your guests will never know.*

- 1 teaspoon dijon
- 2 tablespoon mayo
- 1 tablespoon sour cream
- 1/2 teaspoon honey
- pinch of dried dill
- 100g thinly sliced smoked salmon
- 3 (6 inch) flour tortillas

1. Mix together dijon, mayo, sour cream, honey and dill.

2. Spread 1 tablespoon of the mixture onto each tortilla. Top with a thin layer of salmon, leaving a 1 inch gap on one side (to leave room for the shifting fillings when rolling).

3. Roll up toward the gap and wrap firmly in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for 2 hours before serving.

4. To serve: Trim the ends and slice each roll into 6 slices. Serve immediately.

Serves: 6 (3 pinwheels each)





### Mini "Pumpkin" Cheese Balls

*Contrary to their name these don't actually have any pumpkin in them, but they do have a cute pumpkin shape. Feel free to use your own cheese ball recipe and just follow the shaping instructions.*

- 1 (250g/8oz) pkg. cream cheese
- 1/4 cup finely chopped roasted red peppers
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese
- 2 green onions
- paprika, or dusting

1. Beat softened cream cheese, red peppers, garlic and cayenne until well blended. Stir in cheddar cheese. Refrigerate 2 hours or until firm enough to handle.

2. Roll into 1 inch balls and then coat in paprika. Make indents in the side of each one with a knife to make a pumpkin shape (refrigerate longer if needed before shaping with knife).

3. Slice green onion into 1 inch pieces (green parts only). Slice each piece in half lengthwise. Roll each half back into a circular shape and stick into the top of the cheese ball. Refrigerate until serving.

Makes: 24 cheese balls (4-6 servings each, depending on the size of crackers.)

**Visit [Kitchen Simplicity](http://www.kitchensimplicity.com) for more deliciously simple recipes.**

## Whole-Wheat Buttermilk Rolls with Rosemary

Cooking has always been Aimée's preferred recreational activity, creative outlet, and source of relaxation. After nearly ten years in the professional cooking industry, she went from restaurant to RSS by trading her tongs and clogs for cookie cutters and a laptop, serving as editor of the popular food blog, [Simple Bites](#).

Originally posted on [Simple Bites](#).



*A one hundred percent whole wheat roll that you don't have to feel guilty about eating, these easy buns are softened by the addition of butter, lightened with buttermilk and fun to make with the kids.*

Yields: 12 dinner rolls

- 1 Tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1 Tablespoon [whole cane sugar](#)
- 3 Tablespoons warm water
- 1 cup buttermilk, room temperature
- 1 large egg
- 2 1/2 cups organic stone ground whole wheat bread flour
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon chopped rosemary, plus more for garnish
- 6 Tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
- 12 [Bernardin Mason Jam Jars \(125 mL\)](#)

1. In a small bowl, stir together yeast, cane sugar, and warm water; let mixture stand in a warm place until yeast begins to foam, about five minutes.

2. Meanwhile, combine whole wheat flour, chopped rosemary and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook. Make a well in the center.

3. Whisk yeast mixture with a fork until dissolved. Add buttermilk; stir in egg. Pour into the flour well.

4. With the mixer on low, combine flour and liquid until just combined. Turn off mixer and allow to sit for 10 minutes for the wheat to absorb the liquid.

5. Scrape down the sides of the mixer. With the mixer on low, add butter, one tablespoon at a time, until it is all absorbed.

6. Knead dough on low for five minutes, scraping down the mixer as needed. Dough will come together to be a smooth, elastic mass. It will be sticky, but do not add more flour.

7. Grease a medium bowl with olive oil and place bread dough in the bottom. Cover loosely with plastic wrap or a tea towel and allow to rise in a warm place for 1 hour.

8. Place your jam jars on a cookie sheet and prepare by oiling generously with olive oil and sprinkling the bottoms with cornmeal.

9. Turn dough onto an oiled counter and divide into ten or twelve pieces. Shape dough into round balls, [as demonstrated in Aimee's short video](#), and place into prepared jam jars. Cover with a clean towel and allow to rise for 1 hour.

10. Preheat oven to 400°F. Brush the tops of the rolls with melted butter and snip tops with scissors. Place rosemary sprig in the center of the snipped area and sprinkle tops with sea salt.

11. Place in a hot oven and bake for 22 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly. Serve warm.

Visit [Simple Bites](#) for more real food and helpful tips for real families.

#### **Aimée's Tips to Working with Whole Wheat Flour:**

Whole wheat flour cannot be swapped interchangeably with white; it needs a little extra TLC. With the right care, though, it yields a much more flavorful -and healthy- result.

Here are my tips for successful baking with whole wheat flour.

#### **Add more liquid to the dough.**

White flour can be swapped with whole wheat if at least 1/4 cup of extra liquid is added *per cup of liquid that the recipe calls for*.

**Don't rush the process.** Allow dough to rest for at least ten minutes immediately after the flour is incorporated, and give it a double rising if possible.

**Allow dough to be sticky** and resist the temptation to add more flour. It will all work out in the end.

If you must add a sprinkling of flour, for rolling or shaping dough, **use a bit of white flour**.

## Pumpkin Dinner Rolls

Crystal Paine blogs at [MoneySavingMom.com](http://MoneySavingMom.com), an upbeat and encouraging blog dedicated to helping you find great deals, stretch your hard-earned dollars, and live on less than you make so you can save more and give more.

Originally posted on [Money Saving Mom](http://Money Saving Mom).



*Even if you don't normally make homemade rolls for Thanksgiving, you might just want to consider taking a little extra effort to make these rolls this year. They are just that good.*

- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup warm water
- 2 cup warm milk
- 1/4 cup butter, softened or melted
- 2 cup mashed cooked pumpkin
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 cup wheat germ (can omit and use flour instead)
- 10-12 cup all-purpose flour (I usually use a mixture of whole-wheat and white flours. 'd recommend going about 1/3 whole-wheat to 2/3 white flour.)
- 7 teaspoons dry yeast

1. In large mixing bowl, combine sugar, water, milk, butter, pumpkin, and salt. Mix well. Add wheat germ, 7-8 cups of the flour, and yeast. Mix, and then continue adding flour and kneading until dough is elastic and not sticky.

2. Place dough in greased bowl; grease top of dough, cover with a towel, and set in a warm place until doubled (about 1 hour). Punch dough down and divide into thirds. Divide each third into 16 pieces and shape into balls.
3. Place on greased baking sheets. Cover and let rise until almost doubled, about 30 minutes.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 15-18 minutes, until tops are golden. Brush with melted butter as soon as they come out of the oven. Best served within an hour or two.

*Note: These rolls usually look somewhat dry when first coming out of the oven. Wait about 15 minutes and they will look and taste beautifully. Don't ask me why, but that's how it always works for me!*

Yield: 4 dozen rolls\*

\*If you're not expecting a large crowd for Thanksgiving, I'd recommend halving the recipe. I often do this for smaller groups and it works great!)

Adapted from [TammysRecipes.com](http://TammysRecipes.com).

**Visit [Money Saving Mom](http://MoneySavingMom.com) for tips to help you become a better home economist.**

## Holiday Cranberry Salad

Tara Kuczykowski is a married mom of three boys and two girls, ages 2 to 8 years. For the past two-and-a-half years, Tara has been helping families stretch their budgets at the popular money-saving blog, [Deal Seeking Mom](#), and she's now sharing her tips, tricks, recipes and more at [Unsophisticook](#), where she's "keeping it real in the kitchen!"



*Even if you hate cranberries, give this cranberry salad a shot. Truthfully, it's more like a dessert, but we always eat it as a side with our Thanksgiving meal.*

- 2 small packages raspberry Jell-O
- 1.5 cups boiling water
- 1 20-oz. can crushed pineapple
- 1 can whole cranberry sauce
- 3/4 cup pecans, chopped
- 1 8-oz. package cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup sour cream

1. Dissolve Jell-O in boiling water.
2. In a 9" x 13" glass dish, add pineapple, cranberry sauce, liquid mixture, cranberry juice and pecans, reserving some pecans to sprinkle on top. Mix well and refrigerate until firm.
3. Cream together cream cheese, sugar and sour cream until smooth.
4. When the first mixture is firm, spread the creamed ingredients on top and sprinkle with chopped pecans.

**Visit [Unsophisticook.com](#), where Tara keeps it real in the kitchen.**

## Savory Turkey Gravy

Adapted from [allrecipes.com](http://allrecipes.com).

### *Ingredients:*

- 5 cups turkey stock
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon celery salt

### *Directions:*

1. To start, bring your turkey stock to a boil in a medium sauce pan.
2. While the stock is heating up, dissolve the flour in water in a separate bowl.
3. Gradually whisk the flour mixture into the stock.
4. Stir in the seasonings and then bring the gravy to a boil again.
5. Reduce the heat and simmer for 8-10 minutes until thickened.

# Homemade Traditional Turkey Stuffing

Tara Kuczykowski is a married mom of three boys and two girls, ages 2 to 8 years. For the past two-and-a-half years, Tara has been helping families stretch their budgets at the popular money-saving blog, [Deal Seeking Mom](#), and she's now sharing her tips, tricks, recipes and more at [Unsophisticook](#), where she's "keeping it real in the kitchen!"

*A true homemade stuffing that has been passed down in our family for several generations. If the thought of making your own turkey stock is a little overwhelming, I'm sure you could substitute a good store bought turkey stock.*

- 1 loaf bread
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 4 medium yellow onions, chopped
- 1 T. butter
- turkey neck, heart, liver, and gizzard
- 1 t. poultry seasoning
- 3 cups water
- 3 medium eggs
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3 T. dried parsley
- salt
- pepper

1. Toast each piece of bread from a full loaf. I usually use a wheat bread, but you can use whatever your family likes best. Alternately, you could lay all of the bread out to dry 4 days before making the stuffing, turning once per day for even drying.

2. Add the turkey neck, heart, liver, and gizzard to a small saucepan. Cover with water and add poultry seasoning and about 1 t. salt. Bring to a boil, and then simmer for about 45 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, sauté the celery and onion in the butter over medium heat until they turn translucent and caramelize.

4. Skim the foam off the top of the turkey stock, and pour off the stock into a bowl. Discard everything else except for the liver.

5. Chop the toasted or dried bread up into cubes and put in a large foil pan. Chop the turkey liver up very finely and sprinkle it over the top. Add the celery and onion mixture and dried parsley. Salt and pepper the mixture well. Lightly beat the eggs with the milk, and pour the mixture over the top. Pour some of the turkey stock over the top, and mix everything together with a large spoon. Add turkey stock until everything is moistened (wet but not soupy). Keep in mind that you may not need to use it all.

6. Cover with foil and bake at 350 degrees for about two hours.

**Visit [Unsophisticook.com](#), where Tara keeps it real in the kitchen.**

## Perfect and Flavorful Mashed Potatoes

Cheryl is a mom to two energetic and strong-willed little girls. It's a good thing they already like her cooking. She blogs the family's cooking and taste adventures at [Backseat Gourmet](#).

Originally posted on [Simple Bites](#).



### Choose the Right Potato

What matters most when it comes to mashed potatoes is the type of potato used and how you mash it. Choose wrong and your pretty much guarantee either lumps or gluey potatoes. And no amount of gravy can cover that up.

The classic russet potato, with its slightly wrinkly brown skin and multi-purpose texture is a good one for mashed potatoes. You might describe the texture as mealy, as opposed to firm. This is because they have a low moisture content and high starches. Idaho is another good mashing potato.

Stay away from fingerlings, those soft and red skinned new potatoes, and the fancy ones in blue.

Of course, if you don't mind a few lumps and less than ethereal potatoes, then go with your favorite reds (like I often do).

## **Mashing**

Hands down, the best tool for fluffy mashed potatoes is the [potato ricer](#). Picture a giant garlic press and you've got it. Of course, in my small kitchen gadgetry is kept to a minimum, therefore I have no ricer. But I do like my masher. And use a masher you must! Push hard with your potato masher and go through the pot well to get through all the lumps.

I've seen recipes and posts about using an electric mixer for potatoes. I do not recommend this. It is very easy to get gluey potatoes this way. Work the starches a bit too much and it can happen.

## **Basic Cookery**

There is no real recipe for mashed potatoes. And if you come across one, I suggest throwing it out. Mashed potatoes is simple, easy cooking. Like everything else in the kitchen, it takes a bit of time and effort. In fact, the most irritating commercial to me at the moment is the one that tells people "Who has time to wash, peel, and cut potatoes?" It's just potatoes people, not rocket science.

All you need to do is wash, peel, and cut your potatoes. Aim for a consistency in size.

Place them in a large pot of cold water, well covered. Bring to a boil on high heat. Cook until a fork goes through a potato quite easily.

Pour your cooked potatoes into a strainer then pour them back into the cooking pot. It's okay if a little liquid goes with them. Mash immediately.

Stir in your preferred additions.

## **All Dressed Up**

At a bare minimum I mash my potatoes with butter. After that I believe it is masher's prerogative on additions. The classic combo is butter and milk. That additional dairy helps the creaminess, but isn't necessary.

*Here is a list of great additions for your potatoes:*

- Roasted garlic
- Horseradish or wasabi
- Buttermilk
- Cheese – mascarpone, cream cheese, cheddar, blue (anything that melts easily)
- Caramelized onions
- Sautéed mushrooms
- Bacon or ham
- Chives
- Mashed celeriac (celery root)
- Sundried tomatoes
- Or, leave the peels on for flavor and fiber

**Visit [Backseat Gourmet](#) for more of Cheryl's cooking and taste adventures.**

## Sweet Potato Casserole with Marshmallow & Pecan Topping

Mandi Ehman is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom of four little girls under six. She blogs at [Life...Your Way](http://yourway.net) with one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.



*I love sweet potatoes and often eat the leftovers cold for days following our actual Thanksgiving meal. If you use really big sweet potatoes, the potatoes themselves won't be overly sweet, but the toppings add just the right amount of sweetness.*

### *Sweet Potatoes:*

- 4 large sweet potatoes
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup

### *Topping:*

- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup butter, melted
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 2 cups mini marshmallows

1. Bake sweet potatoes at 400 degrees for 45-60 minutes until tender.
2. Peel and mash the baked sweet potatoes. Add sugar, eggs, milk, salt, melted butter and maple syrup. Mix well and transfer into a greased 9x13-inch dish.
3. Mix the brown sugar, flour, melted butter and pecans in a separate bowl. Crumble mixture evenly over sweet potatoes in diagonal rows.
4. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25 minutes. Add mini marshmallows to alternate rows and bake for an additional 15 minutes until the marshmallows are golden brown.

**Visit [Life...Your Way](http://yourway.net) for tips and life hacks to help you live your best life.**

## Green Beans with Caramelized Onions

Tara is a wife and mom who balances a full-time job as a public high school science teacher with her passion for blogging. She started [Feels Like Home](#) in 2007 and posts on a variety of topics: food and cooking tips, craft ideas and parenting (mis)adventures to help make readers' lives easier – or at least make them laugh along the way.

### Ingredients:

- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 pound of pearl onions or coarsely chopped onions
- 1 pound of fresh green beans
- 1 tablespoons of chopped fresh dill
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground pepper

### Directions:

1. Heat oil and sugar together in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions and sauté until tender and golden brown, stirring often, about 10 minutes.
2. Add green beans until crisp-tender, stirring frequently, about 3 minutes.
3. Remove from heat and stir in dill, salt, and pepper.
4. Serve immediately

Note: Stirring the fresh dill in after cooking preserves its flavor. Heating decreases the flavor of dill.

**Visit [Feels Like Home](#) for more food, recipes and tutorials.**

## Roasted Winter Vegetables

Katie Kimball may have to use a saw to get through pie pumpkins, but she loves fall flavors and smells anyway. Find her roaming a Michigan apple orchard, jumping in leaves with her two young children, or writing about food and faith at [Kitchen Stewardship](http://www.kitchenstewardship.com).

Originally posted on [Kitchen Stewardship](http://www.kitchenstewardship.com).



### Ingredients:

- 1 fennel
- 2 turnips
- 3 carrots
- 2 parsnips
- 1-2 cups winter squash (I used buttercup)
- 3+ Tbs extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp fresh thyme
- salt and pepper
- 2 Tbs chopped fresh parsley

1. Cut the parsnips into 1-inch chunks and roast for at least 20 minutes, or steam them, to give them a head start.

2. Cut the rest of the vegetables into 2-inch chunks. Use only the bulbous part of the fennel and save the stalks and fronds for [homemade stock](#) or a versatile recipe in which anise-flavored celery would fit.
2. To prepare the squash, you may need to place it, whole, into the oven during the preheat to soften in order to cut it in half. Scoop out the seeds, then cut into chunks. If using a butternut squash, you may be able to peel it with a vegetable peeler. You might roast the rest of the squash at the same time and puree it for many different uses.
3. In a large roasting pan or 9×13 glass dish, toss the vegetable chunks with at least 2 Tbs extra virgin olive oil to coat. Add the thyme, salt and pepper and mix well.
4. Roast in a preheated 400 F degree oven for 30 minutes, turning every 10 minutes. Add the last Tablespoon (or more) of oil and continue roasting for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, or until vegetables are brown and caramelized.
5. Serve immediately garnished with fresh parsley.

**Visit [Kitchen Stewardship](#) for more healthy recipes and green living tips.**

## Old-Fashioned Apple Pie

Jen Tilley has an insatiable appetite for all things related to baking and cooking. She is the author, photographer and recipe developer on [How To: Simplify](#), a blog that shares tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen. She enjoys sharing recipes that require very few ingredients and only a small amount of prep and cook time, all of which make time spent in the kitchen simple and enjoyable.

Originally posted on [How To: Simplify](#).



*From gooey filling to the flaky crust, this apple pie is a homemade classic. If you're responsible for bringing dessert this year, it's guaranteed to be a huge hit.*

### Pastry:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons shortening
- 4 to 6 tablespoons cold water

### Filling:

- 1/3 to 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 8 cups thinly sliced/peeled tart apples
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine

1. In medium bowl, mix 2 cups flour and 1 teaspoon salt. Cut in shortening, using pastry blender (or pulling 2 table knives through ingredients in opposite directions) until particles are the size of small peas. Sprinkle with cold water, 1 tablespoon at a time, tossing with fork until all flour is moistened and pastry almost cleans side of bowl (1 to 2 teaspoons more water can be added if necessary).

2. Gather pastry into a ball. Divide in half; shape into 2 flattened rounds on lightly floured surface. Wrap in plastic wrap; refrigerate for about 45 minutes or until dough is firm and cold, yet pliable.

3. Heat oven to 425 degrees F. With floured rolling pin, roll one pastry round into round 2 inches larger than an upside-down 9-inch pie plate. Fold pastry into fourths; place in pie plate. Unfold and ease into plate, pressing against bottom and side.

4. In large bowl, mix sugar, 1/4 cup flour, cinnamon, nutmeg and 1/8 teaspoon salt. Stir in apples until mixed well. Spoon into pastry-lined plate. Cut butter into small pieces; sprinkle over filling. Trim overhanging edge of pastry 1/2 inch from rim of plate.
5. Roll other round of pastry into 10-inch round. Fold into fourths and cut slits so steam can escape. Unfold top pastry over filling; trim overhanging edge 1 inch from rim of plate. Fold and roll top edge under lower edge, pressing on rim to seal; flute as desired. Cover edge with 2- to 3-inch strips of foil to prevent excessive browning.
6. Bake 40 to 50 minutes or until crust is brown and juice begins to bubble through slits in crust, removing foil during the last 15 minutes of baking. Serve warm, if desired.

**Visit [How To: Simplify](#) for more tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen!**

## Aunt Rita's Pecan Pie with Gigi's Wheat Pie Crust

Amy is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom to three girls, and wife to a youth pastor. You can find this unlikely pastor's wife chatting about homeschooling, her coffee addition, marriage, ministry, couponing, frugality and her girls on her site, [Amy Loves It](#).

Originally posted by [Amy Loves It](#).



### Gigi's Wheat Pie Crust

- 3/4 cup wheat flour
  - 3/4 cup white flour
  - 1/4 COLD water
  - 1/2 cup shortening
  - 1/2 tsp salt
1. Sift flour with salt.
  2. Cut in shortening until mixture is coarse and granular.
  3. Work water in lightly.
  4. Roll out onto floured surface.

### **Aunt Rita's Pecan Pie**

- 1 cup sugar
- 2 Tbsp flour (I use white)
- 2 Tbsp butter
- 3 eggs
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup white corn syrup
- 1 cup chopped pecans

1. Add flour to sugar.
2. Add butter to sugar/flour and cream together (I use my hand mixer)
3. Add slightly beaten eggs, salt, vanilla, and syrup: mix well.
4. Add pecans and stir.
5. Pour into unbaked pie shell and bake at 300 degree F for 60-75 minutes, checking after 1 hour and every 10 minutes thereafter until pie is not "shaky"

**Visit [Amy Loves It](#) for her favorite deals, recipes and tips for home managers.**

## Homemade Pumpkin Puree

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and [Olmanson Photography](#), a daily contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the editor of the [food channel](#) for Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found in one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

Originally posted on [Food for My Family](#).



*I use this in all my pumpkin recipes, from [tarts](#), to [pasties](#), to [breads](#). I have a few new ones I'm excited to be sharing with you as well. I collect pumpkins and roast them while I clean or do laundry or other things around the house. I've been freezing the puree so I have it available all winter and later in the holiday season to bake with, and I can't wait to start.*

- 3- to 4-pound pumpkin
- 1 cup water

Preheat the oven to 350° F. In a 9×13" baking dish, place pumpkin halves. Add water. Bake for one hour or until flesh is soft and easy to scoop.

Scoop the pumpkin flesh out, leaving behind the outer shell, and into a blender or food processor. Blend, pulsing until the purée is smooth and uniform in texture. Strain through a cloth to remove excess moisture. Store in airtight containers in the refrigerator for up to three days and in the freezer for up to three months.

Makes 2 to 3 cups pumpkin purée.

**Visit [Food for My Family](#) for more tips and recipes.**

## Pumpkin Ginger Pie with Gingersnap Streusel

At [My Blessed Life](#), a lifestyle blog dedicated to inspiring peaceful hearts and beautiful homes. Myra shares frugal decorating tips and crafts, recipes, photos, inspirational posts, product reviews/giveaways and DIY tutorials. Her motto is that "a beautiful home is more than meets the eye; ultimately, it's a matter of the heart."

Originally posted on [My Blessed Life](#):



*What I especially loved about this pie was that it's not super sweet or super rich.*

### *Filling:*

- 1 can (15 oz) pumpkin (not pumpkin pie mix)
- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- 2 t. grated fresh ginger
- 1 t. pumpkin pie spice
- 1/4 t. salt

### *Crust:*

- 1 frozen deep dish pie crust

*Streusel:*

- 1/2 cup crushed gingersnap cookies (about 9)
- 2 T. packed brown sugar
- 2 T. all purpose flour
- 2 T. butter, softened
- 1/4 cup chopped pecans

1. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Place cookie sheet on oven rack. In large bowl, mix filling ingredients. Pour into pie crust.

2. Bake pie on cookie sheet 15 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees; bake 15 minutes longer. Meanwhile, in small bowl, mix streusel ingredients. Sprinkle streusel over filling. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes longer or until knife inserted in center comes out clean.

3. Cool completely on cooling rack, about 3 hours. Cover and refrigerate any remaining pie. Enjoy!!

**Visit [My Blessed Life](#) for inspiration for a peaceful life and beautiful home.**

## Pumpkin Pecan Cheesecake Pots

Katie Goodman is a SAHM turned WAHM determined to make family meal time a priority while providing a variety of healthy and delicious food choices. In her free time, she blogs at [goodLife {eats}](http://goodLife{eats}), where she shares what she finds good in the kitchen and in life through recipes, family memories, and yummy photography.

Originally posted on [Good Life Eats](http://Good Life Eats):



*I love recipes like this that are so simple to prepare yet always seem to impress people. These pumpkin cheese pots are such a pretty presentation and the flavors are excellent.*

- 1 cup graham cracker or gingersnap cookie crumbs
- 1 T. butter, melted
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 cup whipping cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 14 ounces pumpkin puree
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon allspice
- 1/8 teaspoon cloves
- 1/8 teaspoon cardamom
- 1/8 teaspoon xanthan gum (optional - a natural thickener)
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 4 whole pecan halves
- sweetened whipped cream for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 350° (I used the toaster oven). Crush the graham crackers or gingersnaps to create crumbs. Add melted butter, stir well to combined. Spread on baking sheet. Toast in the oven 3 – 5 minutes until crumbs start to brown. Cool.
2. Process the cream cheese, sugars, cream and vanilla in a food processor until smooth. Add the pumpkin puree, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, cardamom, and xanthan gum. Process until smooth.
3. Spoon a half of the graham cracker crumbs into four 1/2 cup-capacity dishes, layer on a few chopped pecans. Divide half of the cheesecake mixture evenly between the dishes and top with the remaining graham cracker or gingersnap crumbs and then more pecans. Divide the remaining cheesecake mixture between the dishes.
4. Garnish with whipped cream and pecans. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until firm. Serves 4.

**Visit [goodLife {eats}](#) for more tasty recipes and beautiful photos.**

## Layered Chocolate Pie

Embracing the joys of living in a Tiny Town in Kansas, Amy relishes time at home with her 4 children and helping her husband with his teaching and coaching responsibilities. At [The Finer Things in Life](#), she encourages frugal, simple, at-home living; nurturing relationships as a faith-filled mother and wife; and living well for less.

Originally posted on [The Finer Things in Life](#).



*I've heard this dessert called many a name over the years: Layered Chocolate Pie Dessert, Chocolate Delight, Robert Redford Dessert, and that-chocolate-layered-stuff-we-have-to-have-at-every-family-gathering. It's so good!*

### *Crust:*

- 2 c. flour
- 1 1/2 sticks butter (softened)
- 1/2 c. nuts

Mix flour, butter, and nuts. Press into the bottom of a 9×13 pan. Bake 20 minutes at 350°. Allow to cool.

### *Filling:*

- 8 oz. cream cheese (room temperature)
- 1 c. powdered sugar
- 4 1/2 oz. tub whipped topping

Mix cream cheese, powdered sugar, and whipped topping. Spread over cooled crust.

*Pudding:*

- large (6 oz.) box chocolate instant pudding
- 3 c. milk

Mix pudding and milk according to package directions. Pour/spread over cream cheese layer.

*Topping:*

- 9 oz. carton whipped topping
- nuts, chopped candy bars, chocolate shavings

Spread pudding with whipped topping. Sprinkle your choice of nuts or candy on top. Refrigerate until serving.

**Visit [The Finer Things in Life](http://yourway.net) to embrace the extraordinary in every day.**

## Pilgrim Hat Cupcakes

Liz Latham is a wife and mother of three. She blogs at [Hoosier Homemade](http://HoosierHomemade.com), where she shares great tips on homemaking, baking, cooking & decorating. And of course, lot & lots of CUPCAKES!

Originally posted on [Hoosier Homemade](http://HoosierHomemade.com).



*Thanksgiving Cupcakes are not your typical dessert to enjoy, but these Pilgrim Cupcakes are definitely kid friendly. You could have the cupcakes frosted and place a cupcake at each child's place setting along with the candy and cookie and let them decorate their own.*

- cupcakes
- [buttercream frosting](#)
- fudge striped cookies
- mini peanut butter cups

1. Frost cupcakes with buttercream frosting (I used [Wilton Copper](#) to color it)
2. Place cookie upside down on the counter
3. Unwrap peanut butter cups, and place on cookie with a small amount of frosting

4. Pipe on the gold buckle and rim using a decorator bag fitted with a small round tip (I used copper and yellow Wilton coloring mixed, plain yellow would be fine too)

5. Place the pilgrim hat on top of the frosted cupcake.

**Visit [Hoosier Homemade](http://HoosierHomemade.com) for cupcakes, budget-friendly meals and more.**

## Pumpkin Bars with Cream Cheese Frosting

Jen Tilley has an insatiable appetite for all things related to baking and cooking. She is the author, photographer and recipe developer on [How To: Simplify](#), a blog that shares tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen. She enjoys sharing recipes that require very few ingredients and only a small amount of prep and cook time, all of which make time spent in the kitchen simple and enjoyable.

Originally posted on [How To: Simplify](#).



### Bars:

- 4 eggs
- 1 2/3 cups sugar
- 1 cup canola oil
- 1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

### Frosting:

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 3-4 cups confectioners' sugar
- 1-2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease a 9x13 baking dish.
2. Mix the eggs, sugar, oil and pumpkin with a mixer until light and fluffy.
3. Pour flour, powder, cinnamon, salt and baking soda into another bowl and mix.
4. Pour flour mixture into pumpkin mixture and mix until incorporated and smooth.
5. Pour the batter into the baking dish and level out the batter.
6. Bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
7. Remove from the oven and allow to cool before removing from the dish or frosting.
8. Frost the bars when they have cooled -- *To make the frosting:* Combine softened cream cheese and butter in a bowl and mix until smooth. Add the sugar slowly until you reach the desired consistency. Stir in the vanilla.

Visit [How To: Simplify](#) for more tips, tricks and recipes to simplify life in the kitchen!

## Healthy Pumpkin Cookies

Katie Kimball may have to use a saw to get through pie pumpkins, but she loves fall flavors and smells anyway. Find her roaming a Michigan apple orchard, jumping in leaves with her two young children, or writing about food and faith at [Kitchen Stewardship](http://www.KitchenStewardship.com).

Originally posted on [Kitchen Stewardship](http://www.KitchenStewardship.com).



*With two variations using either raisins or chocolate chips, you can truly make these seasonal pumpkin cookies be a totally different experience. You have to love a recipe that tastes like a dessert but has so much goodness in it!*

- 2 cups [butter](#) or [coconut oil](#)
- 1 1/2 c. sucanat
- 2 c. pumpkin or squash
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp. vanilla
- 4 c. white whole wheat flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 c. chocolate chips or raisins
- 1 c. chopped nuts

1. Cream fat and sweetener. Add pumpkin, eggs and vanilla; beat well. Stir together flour and next 6 dry ingredients. Add to batter; mix well. Stir in choc chips and nuts.

2. Drop rounded teaspoonfuls two inches apart on a greased cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees for 12-15 minutes.

Visit [Kitchen Stewardship](http://www.KitchenStewardship.com) for more healthy recipes and green living tips.

## Recipes for Your Turkey Leftovers

Shaina Olmanson is the home cook and photographer behind [Food for My Family](#) and [Olmanson Photography](#), a daily contributor to Babble.com's [Family Kitchen Blog](#) and the editor of the [food channel](#) for Lifetime Moms. Shaina can usually be found in one of three places: cooking, at the computer or behind the camera.

Originally posted on [Simple Bites](#).



### The Art of Eating Leftovers

Eating leftovers is an art. If you just loaded up a Thanksgiving-style plate every day for lunch and dinner, you'd tire of them rather quickly. Instead, the key here is to take those leftovers and turn them into something new and different than the Thanksgiving meal they came from. Here are a few tips to get you started.

- **Look for different seasonings and flavors.** Fried rice made with leftover vegetables tastes nothing like stuffing and mashed potatoes, so it will keep you and your family interested in what you're eating.
- **Think outside the box.** Don't limit yourself to the obvious – turkey sandwiches. Instead, think of new and different ways you can stretch those leftovers. Can turkey pieces be added to calzone pockets instead?
- **Mix it up.** Mashed potatoes make a great canvas for things like potato dumplings when you add in a bit of flour and baking powder.



### **Turkey Shepherd's Pie**

- 1 cup leftover turkey, diced
- 1 cup frozen carrot coins (or other vegetable)
- 1 cup leftover or blanched green beans
- 2 tablespoons fresh herbs (thyme, rosemary, oregano)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Black pepper to taste
- 2 cups leftover mashed potatoes
- 1 generous tablespoon cream

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix together turkey, carrots, green beans, fresh herbs and garlic and place in a 2-quart baking dish. In a small bowl or measuring cup, mix cream with nutmeg, salt and pepper. Pour cream over the top of the vegetables. Reheat potatoes just slightly to make them easier to work with and stir in the remaining tablespoon of cream. Add them into a large piping bag and pipe over the top of the vegetables.

Bake covered at 350°F for 40 minutes. Remove the cover and bake for an additional 20 minutes to allow potatoes to brown slightly. Let rest 10-15 minutes before serving.



### **Cream of Turkey and Wild Rice Soup**

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 cups mirepoix (diced onions, celery and carrots)
- ½ cup sliced mushrooms (optional)
- ¼ cup flour
- 3 cups chicken stock
- ¼ cup sherry or dry white wine
- 1 cup cooked leftover wild rice (white or brown rice can also be used)
- 1 cup leftover turkey, chopped

Heat one tablespoon of butter in a large stockpot over medium heat. Add in mirepoix and mushrooms (if using) and sauté for 10 minutes until vegetables are tender. Add in the remaining butter and melt. Whisk in flour and continue to cook for approximately 3 minutes until roux is a nice, golden brown color.

Stir in chicken broth until there are no lumps left. Add sherry, rice and turkey. Allow to simmer 20 minutes until heated through. Taste and season with salt and pepper as needed\*. Serve with leftover dinner rolls.

\*You'll need to add more or less salt depending on how seasoned your stock is.

## More Leftover Turkey Recipes

- [Turkey Linguine with Thyme](#) | Under the High Chair
- [Creamy Turkey and Mushroom Casserole](#) | Food for My Family
- [My Favorite Turkey Sandwich, The Beach](#) | Food for My Family
- [Leftover Turkey Pot Pie](#) | The Pioneer Woman
- [Cranberry-Turkey Enchiladas](#) | Recipe Girl
- [Turkey Cranberry Sandwich](#) | Savory Sweet Life
- [Turkey Tetrazzini](#) | Simply Recipes

**Visit [Food for My Family](#) for more tips and recipes.**

## Counting Your Blessings with Corn Kernels

Mandi Ehman is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom of four little girls under six. She blogs at [Life...Your Way](http://Life...Your Way) with one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

We have this cute little Thanksgiving book called *Thanksgiving*, by Laura Alden. It's really just the story of one family's Thanksgiving celebration, and they share this fun tradition in the book:

Abigail, the youngest daughter in the book, draws a task from the Thanksgiving jar:

*Abigail drew, "On Thanksgiving Day, put five kernels of corn beside each plate."*

*"What's the corn for?" she asked.*

*"Well," said Mom, "one year the Pilgrims' crops didn't get enough rain. The Pilgrims didn't have much food to eat – maybe just a few grains of corn a day. Then rain came and their crops were saved."*

*"But why am I supposed to put corn by our plates?" asked Abigail.*

*"Many people use five kernels of corn to remember that the Pilgrims didn't have very much," Mom answered. "It also helps people remember how much we have today." So right before Thanksgiving dinner, we will each name five things for which we are thankful, said Mom.*

I think that's such a beautiful tradition, no matter what age you are!

The book also includes this funny song that we always end up singing for months after Thanksgiving:

*A turkey is a funny bird.*

*It's head goes wobble wobble.*

*It knows just one funny word –*

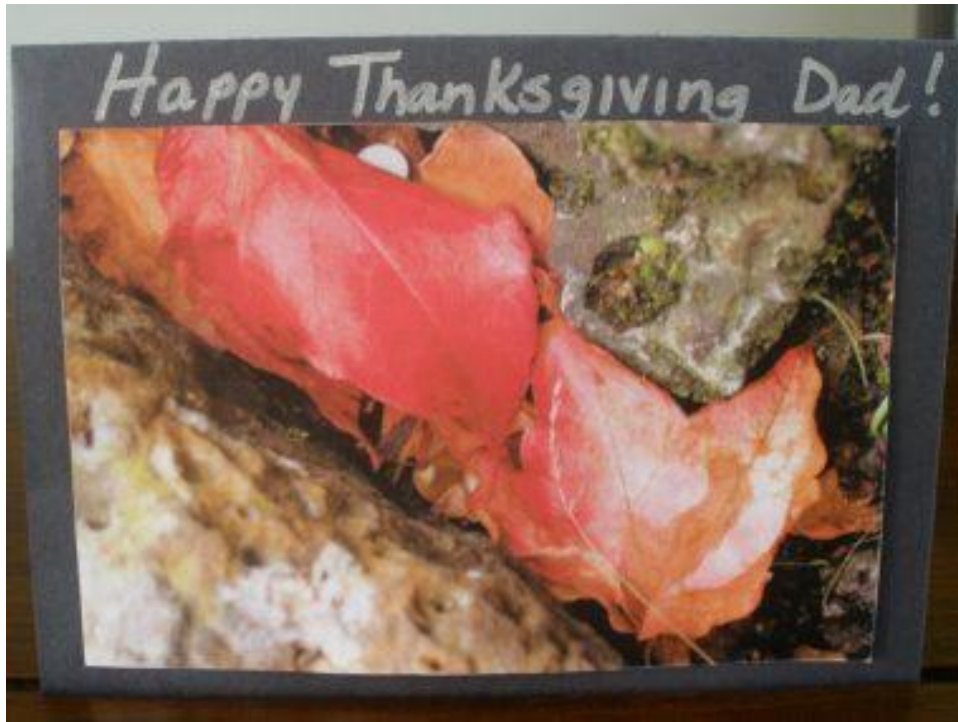
*"Gobble, gobble, gobble."*

**Visit [Motherhood Your Way](http://Motherhood Your Way) for more ideas for intentional parenting.**

## Add a Personal Touch to Your Thanksgiving Table

Sherri is a work-at-home mom to two young boys and has been married to her high school sweetheart, Gwynn, for 13 years. Read more from Sherri at [Serene Journey](#), where she shares simple tips to enjoy life, and at [Zen Family Habits](#), where she talks about all things family.

*Originally posted on [Zen Family Habits](#).*



*Dress up your table with this simple yet personal craft.*

### **What you need:**

- construction paper – as many pieces as there are people
- scissors
- tape
- marker or pen
- pictures – as many as you have people

1. Fold your construction paper in half and cut to just larger than the size of your picture.
2. On the back of your picture add a few pieces of acid free tape (if you don't want to ruin your photos) and place the picture just a bit lower than center on the front of the construction paper.
3. Write a personal message at the top to person who will be sitting at that spot.

**Visit [Zen Family Habits](#) for tips for finding simple happiness.**

## Thankful Trees

Mandi Ehman is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom of four little girls under six. She blogs at [Life...Your Way](http://Life...Your Way) with one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

Originally posted on [Doodles' Place](http://Doodles' Place).



I love these fall thankful trees, especially as my girls get older and are able to express what they're thankful for, and they're SO easy too!

1. Start with a blue piece of construction paper.
2. Cut a piece of green construction paper to look like a grassy hill.
3. Next, cut out a tree trunk with branches from a brown piece of paper. Your branches will most be covered up, so they don't need to be perfect *at all*.
4. Finally, trace and cut out your child's handprints. The easiest way is to stack three sheets of paper together, trace the handprint on the first one and then cut them all out together.
5. Glue your grass and tree trunk to the blue background and then talk about the things you're thankful for and write them on each hand.

Visit [Motherhood Your Way](http://Motherhood Your Way) for more ideas for intentional parenting.

## Too Cute Turkey Treats

Embracing the joys of living in a Tiny Town in Kansas, Amy relishes time at home with her 4 children and helping her husband with his teaching and coaching responsibilities. At [The Finer Things in Life](#), she encourages frugal, simple, at-home living; nurturing relationships as a faith-filled mother and wife; and living well for less.

Originally posted on [The Finer Things in Life](#).



### Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup butter
- package of marshmallows
- 6 cups crispy rice cereal
- chocolate sandwich cookies
- chocolate frosting
- candy corn

1. Melt the butter. Add marshmallows and stir. Heat until marshmallows are melted. Stir in cereal. Let cool for 10 minutes.

2. While the mixture is cooling, twist apart sandwich cookies. Remove white filling.

3. Butter your hands and shape the gooey cereal into 1 1/2 inch balls.

4. Frost the inside of the cookie halves. Press candy corn into the frosting in a fan shape (for 1/2 of the halves).

5. Press a cereal ball into the frosting below the candy corn.

6. Stick the remaining cookie half to the bottom of the cereal ball.

7. Dab frosting on a candy corn and stick it to the cereal ball to make the turkey's head.

Visit [The Finer Things in Life](#) to embrace the extraordinary in every day.

## Family Photo Quilt

Allison McDonald is the founder and editor of [No Time For Flash Cards](#), where she shares her experience as a preschool teacher with fun crafts and educational activities for young children. She lives in the Seattle area with her husband, 3-year-old son and baby daughter.

Originally posted on [No Time for Flashcards](#).



*This Thanksgiving craft is a favorite of mine. Take a bunch of pictures of friends and family and then sit down and make something priceless!*

### What you need:

- card stock
- double stick tape
- something to decorate the paper (paint rollers, stickers, crayons or markers)
- pictures of your family
- ribbon
- scissors
- hole punch

1. Have your child decorate the paper, I only had my son do the cream colored paper because that fit his attention span , but there is no reason not to color all if you want. Let these dry.

2. Next, if your child is able, to have them cut the pictures out in different shapes, you can go free hand or use a paper punch if you have one. If you have a little guy or gal, do this for them. I cut them but had my son tell me who each picture was!
3. Put the double stick tape on the back of the pictures and place them in the middle of the quilt squares.
4. While they are doing that, write the message on a extra piece of card stock. I layered mine for effect.
5. Punch holes in all the corners except the very bottom corners of your bottom squares.
6. Map out your quilt
7. Thread ribbon through the holes and tie. Repeat.
8. Ideally I should have had a dowel and tied the top row of ribbon to it and then hung it, but I didn't, so I just threaded some ribbon through the top two corner holes and push pinned it to the wall.

**Visit [No Time for Flashcards](#) for activities that promote play, discovery & learning.**

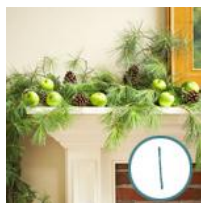
## Frugal Fall Decorating Inspiration

Mandi Ehman is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom of four little girls under six. She blogs at [Life...Your Way](http://Life...Your Way) with one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

Originally posted on [Decorating Your Way](http://Decorating Your Way).



Do you like DIY home décor products? Here are 9 DIY ways you can celebrate fall in your home!



1. [Better Homes & Gardens](http://Better Homes & Gardens): natural garland with pinecones and apples



2. [Twig & Thistle](#): do-it-yourself pine cone garland



3. [About.com](#): paper pumpkin



4. [Sixty-Fifth Avenue](#): gourds on candlestick holders



5. [Nesting Place](#): berries or nuts in a lantern, apothecary jar or dish



6. [My Blessed Life](#): do-it-yourself hanging flower cans



7. [Thrifty Decor Chick](#): a dollar store fall wreath



8. [Market Manila](#): hydrangeas in squash



9. [Sixty-Fifth Avenue](#): acorns in a decorative candle holder

Visit [Decorating Your Way](#) for more *DIY projects and design inspiration*.

## Decorating with Burlap

At [My Blessed Life](#), a lifestyle blog dedicated to inspiring peaceful hearts and beautiful homes. Myra shares frugal decorating tips and crafts, recipes, photos, inspirational posts, product reviews/giveaways and DIY tutorials. Her motto is that "a beautiful home is more than meets the eye; ultimately, it's a matter of the heart."

Originally posted on [Decorating Your Way](#).



Autumn is my favorite time of year! After the unbearably hot summers of the South, I crave cooler weather, pumpkin spice lattes (the only "coffee" I drink), cozy sweaters and shorter days. By the end of August, I'm ready to jump right in to Fall decorating.

Besides candles, leaves, berries, sticks and pumpkins, I love to decorate with burlap. Some people think I'm a little crazy when I tell them how awesome burlap is, but I'm going to show you exactly what I mean.

Burlap is made from the jute plant that originated in India. When woven together, jute is incredibly resilient and resistant to tearing. Burlap sacks were used in the trading industry for centuries. As a child, I remember my grandfather using burlap sacks on his farm...I can still smell those "feed" sacks.

Burlap's wonderful qualities make it delightful for decorating:

### **Burlap is inexpensive.**

It can be found at craft stores (i.e. Hobby Lobby, Michaels) for about \$3/yard. I've even found it on sale for 1/2 price!! Burlap comes about 60" wide, so you get a lot of bang for your buck.

I've also seen burlap sacks at antique stores, which would be perfect for an authentic vintage look.

### **Burlap has a fabulous texture.**

Burlap's wonderful, fibrous texture balances the smooth textures of candles, pumpkins and gourds. Recently, I washed three yards of burlap and it looked like I sheared a sheep in my house by the time it was dry. Ha! Some people complain that burlap smells, which it does, but it smells rustic which is absolutely perfect for ushering in Autumn.

### **Burlap is SO versatile!**

I love that I can use burlap for just about anything I can imagine. It can be ruffled, pleated, draped, framed or painted. I've seen burlap sewn and unsewn. There are no "rules" for decorating with burlap...which is just my kind of thing!

Wreaths, candle wraps, table runners, place mats, pillows and much more can be made with burlap. Use burlap for decorating your home this Fall!

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- [Burlap "BOO" Banner](#) by Everyday Chaos
- [Colorful Burlap Wreath](#) by Craftaholics Anonymous
- [Adorable Burlap Wreath](#) by Where The Heart Is
- [Burlap Napkin Rings](#) and a [Burlap Tablecloth](#) by Tatertots and Jello
- [How To Cut Burlap Straight](#) by Craftaholics Anonymous

**Visit [My Blessed Life](#) for inspiration for a peaceful life and beautiful home.**

## DIY Fall Table Centerpiece

At [My Blessed Life](#), a lifestyle blog dedicated to inspiring peaceful hearts and beautiful homes. Myra shares frugal decorating tips and crafts, recipes, photos, inspirational posts, product reviews/giveaways and DIY tutorials. Her motto is that "a beautiful home is more than meets the eye; ultimately, it's a matter of the heart."

Originally posted on [Decorating Your Way](#).



### What you'll need:

- Two rectangular blocks of artificial foam.
- Hot glue gun and glue sticks
- Floral wire – any thin wire should work
- Floral picks
- Table knife
- Real or artificial leaves
- 4 lbs. clementines
- Sticks from your yard

1. Cut foam in 1/3 and 2/3 sections. The 1/3 will be the top and 2/3 will be the base. The easiest way that I've found to cut this foam is to score it with a table knife and then whack that line on the edge of a table or countertop. I'm real fancy-shmancy! Ha!

2. Hot glue between the long rectangular pieces and firmly press them together. Use two short pieces of wire to stabilize the foam.

3. Trim the short pieces of foam for the top into circles. Hot glue them together and use about three pieces of wire to give extra stability. At this point I spray painted the foam black. This

isn't necessary, but you can do it if you want to.

4. Beginning at the base of the top foam, stick a floral pick in each clementine and poke it into the foam. Don't push the clementines in too far...we are going for a rounded effect.

*Note: If a clementine doesn't feel secure on the floral pick, just squirt a little hot glue into the clementine and then re-insert the floral pick. This works like a charm!*

5. Work your way all over the foam adding clementines. They need to be close together, but don't worry about empty space. The way to fix that is to cut leaves off of the garland (or use whatever leaves you have) and hot glue the leaves to the foam where the foam is showing through.

6. Continue adding clementine picks until the entire "dome" is covered! Set the dome aside while you work on the base.

7. Using hot glue, add sticks to the base. Place them as closely together as possible. You will probably have to break the sticks into the correct length. I even pieced a few together. Continue until the entire base is covered.

8. Add ribbon, twine, burlap or any combination around the stick base.

9. Use hot glue to attach the domed clementine top to the base.

This fresh, natural table arrangement will last about 5-6 days. Spraying the clementines with clear glaze or shellac would definitely help keep them fresh longer. Also, this arrangement could also be made with artificial fruit or berries, which would last indefinitely.

**Visit [My Blessed Life](#) for inspiration for a peaceful life and beautiful home.**

## Table Setting Inspiration

Mandi Ehman is a work-at-home, homeschooling mom of four little girls under six. She blogs at [Life...Your Way](http://Life...Your Way) with one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.



Buying fancy directions or table settings isn't necessary, but there are tons of ways to dress up your everyday table for Thanksgiving. I especially love the pears with nametags, and I think we might do that for our Thanksgiving dinner.



1. Fresh greenery from [My Home Ideas](http://My Home Ideas)



2. Casual and simple from [Good Housekeeping](#)



3. Pretty turkeys from [Martha Stewart](#)



4. Pinecone turkeys from [Martha Stewart](#)



5. Pears from [Martha Stewart](#)



6. Formal and feminine from [House Beautiful](#)



7. Clean and simple from [Martha Stewart](#)



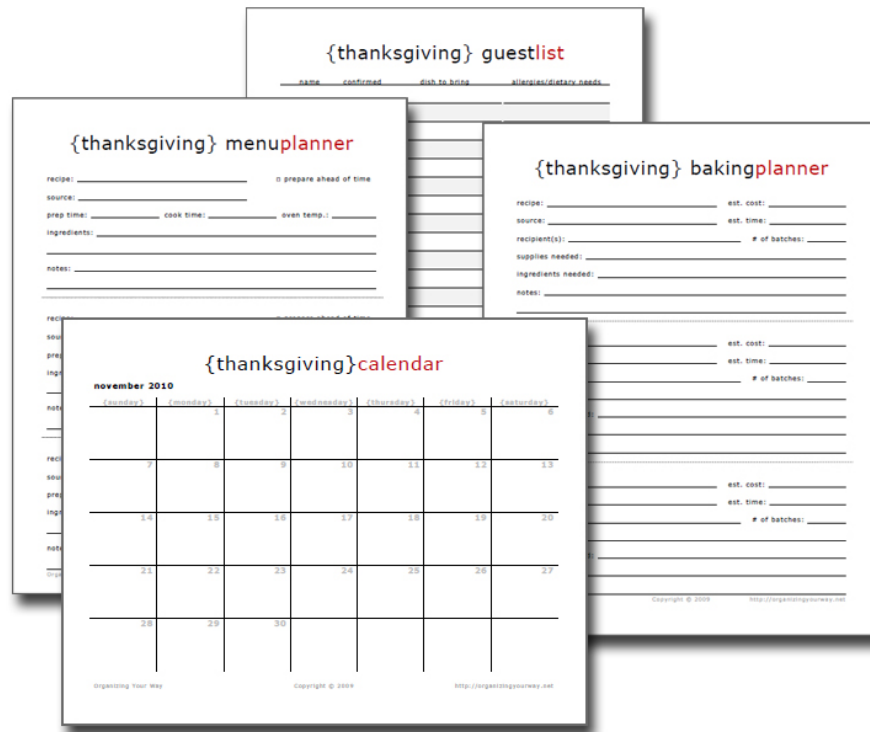
8. Warm and inviting from [My Home Ideas](#)



9. [Natural Beauty](#) from Real Simple

Visit [Decorating Your Way](#) for more DIY projects and design inspiration.

## Printables



Organize all of your Thanksgiving plans in one place with these free printables:

- [Baking Planner](#)
- [Budget Worksheet](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Decor Inventory](#)
- [Family Traditions](#)
- [Guest List](#)
- [Master To-Do List](#)
- [Menu Planner](#)
- [Recipes List](#)
- [Shopping List](#)
- [Black Friday Shopping List](#)

## About Mandi Ehman and Life...Your Way



You might wonder, with a name like [Life...Your Way](#), whether I believe in any absolutes. Let me assure you that I do.

I believe in right and wrong, the God of the Bible, the covenant of marriage and the sanctity of life.

However, I also believe there are lots of gray areas where each of us have to make our own decisions. Some of these are a good/better/ best kind of thing. But most are simply to-MAY-to versus to-MAH-to.

In this internet age, we're hit with opinions, facts and information from every angle every day — about food, finances, motherhood, success and more. And each day we have to wade through it all and try to decide what's best for ourselves, our family and our children.

Life...Your Way has one goal: to help you sort through all of the facts and opinions so you can make an informed decision about what works best for your preferences, your needs and your lifestyle.

### About Mandi

Eight years ago I married the guy who lived across the street.

We set off on a cross-country adventure, moving 3,000 miles away from our family to a city where we knew no one. We made a lot of stupid decisions and did a lot of growing up, and two years later our oldest daughter was born. In the five years that followed, we had three more babies, moved three times and built our dream home on a little slice of heaven in the middle of nowhere. We made a few more mistakes, and our hearts broke as we said goodbye to three babies that we never got to hold in our arms.

These days, my husband has the privilege of being a stay-at-home dad, and I have the incredible privilege of pursuing my passion — writing, blogging and more — while also being home for all of the milestones I wouldn't want to miss and the boobos that need kissing. We're a homeschooling family, which means we get to spend every day together. And most days we consider that a blessing!

Although it might sometimes seem like I've got it all figured out, let me assure you that I don't. There are probably dirty dishes in my sink right now, and I end up wasting time on Facebook more often than I care to admit. Our marriage is beautiful, but not perfect, and I still get buyer's remorse after a stupid impulse purchase. I'm the spokesperson for [Plan to Eat](#), but sometimes I totally ignore my meal plan and we end up eating out because mama doesn't feel like cooking.

But through it all, we're just a family trying to make the best decisions we can while pursuing our passions and enjoying each other. And here at Life...Your Way, I try to share the things I'm thinking about and the lessons we're learning along the way.