

Turkey Time

A&M professors give their take on the best way to prepare the 'Great Feast'

Story by Chris Martin

"Birds fascinate me," offered Dr. Willie F. Krueger, professor of poultry science and former head of Texas A&M's poultry science department, as a clue into what drives a poultry man. For nearly 60 years, Krueger's main course has been the study of chickens and turkeys — the staples of any holiday feast. So when Thanksgiving, the big "turkey day," arrives, what exactly goes on at the home of a poultry professional? Do business and pleasure collide? "I can work with birds all day, get dirty, then go home and eat turkey," Krueger said. "It doesn't bother me in the least." Krueger is one professional who always brings his work home. "When you eat at my house, you eat fowl," Krueger said. "Mrs. Krueger prepares the turkey [for Thanksgiving] because she likes to prepare it her way. But I'm the official carver." Dr. Fred Thornberry, professor of poultry science and extension poultry specialist, takes a more active role in the Thanksgiving meal at his home. "When it's in my home, I'm the one that prepares the turkey," Thornberry said. "I cook the meats and dressings, and I bake the yeast breads. My wife makes four or five different types of pies and a variety of vegetables." The Thanksgiving menu at Thornberry's home may seem traditional, but his preparation methods are anything but. "Well, I very seldom bake a turkey — a lot of times I will Cajun fry one," Thornberry said. "It's a very succulent turkey, not greasy at all. Other times, I will take a deli breast, brown it, put a little seasoning on it, then surround it with good dressing. It's also very delicious, but a Cajun fried turkey is a real delicacy." Unlike Colonel Sanders, the blend of herbs and spices for Thornberry's bird is no secret. "Some folks like to marinate the turkey or inject it," Thornberry said. "But I've found that you'll do a very good job with the turkey if you season it well. Prepare a seasoning mixture of thyme, sage, poultry seasoning, a little tarragon, cracked black pepper and garlic salt."

After gathering the Cajun spices, Thornberry then prepares the turkey. "Sprinkle a little Tobasco on the turkey and rub it in," Thornberry said. "Then apply the mixture of seasonings liberally to the outside and inside of the turkey."

"When the turkey is cooking, the oils pick up the flavor from the seasoning."

Dale Hyatt, manager of the poultry research center, has a reputation in the poultry department for being somewhat of a gourmet chili cook, Thornberry said.

"I'm no five-star chef — don't get me wrong," Hyatt said. "But I enjoy barbecuing and cooking outside."

"I'm more of an outdoor cook — chili and barbecue and what have you. I guess over the past 15 or 20 years, I've perfected a few of them."

Hyatt's recipe for Thanksgiving turkey also includes a special mix of spices.

"It's quite a cross section of different spices, such as pepper, garlic salt and onion powder," Hyatt said. "We let it sit in the refrigerator for a couple days, then we

submerge it in 325-degree peanut oil and whole fry it. That's been our tradition for about the last five years."

And after Thanksgiving, Hyatt puts the proverbial turkey leftovers to good use in a uniquely Texan way.

"I like to make turkey chili," Hyatt said. "I prefer to use the dark meat. It makes an excellent chili."

"But I tell you, when you deep fat fry those turkeys you won't have a lot of leftovers. You'll throw rocks at the baked ones after you try it."

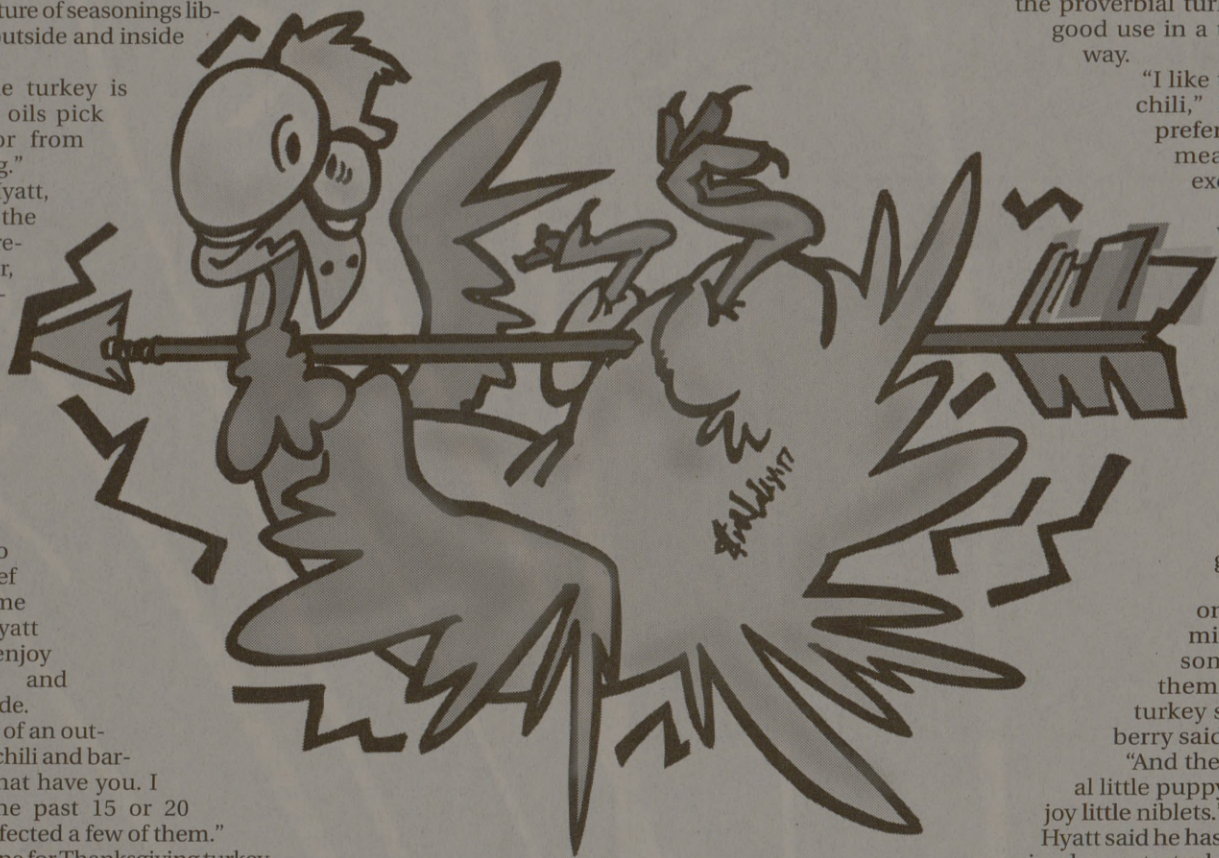
Thornberry also puts the leftovers to good use.

"I'll eat them on sandwiches, I might make some hash with them or real good turkey soup," Thornberry said.

"And then I have several little puppy dogs that enjoy little nibbles."

Hyatt said he has no problem in coming home to turkey after a long day at work.

"I enjoy doing it off the clock as well as on," Hyatt said. "That's my career, and I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it."



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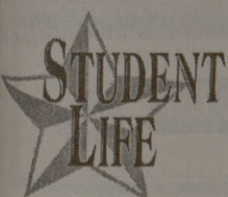
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