

How to Experience a More Fulfilling Thanksgiving

I remember the first time I hosted Thanksgiving at my house. I was newly married and full of energy and excitement for my very first Thanksgiving. I did my shopping and preparation with so much enthusiasm and could not wait for the day to come.

On Thanksgiving morning I woke up early to set the table, make sure the decorations were all right, and the house looked neat. I was overjoyed as my nieces made their way into the house, skipping on the driveway, carrying flowers. I was so happy to see everyone, my in-laws, an aunt and a couple of cousins, my dad and sister. The absence of my mom who had passed away two years before was very palpable for me but I kept a Lily-scented candle burning all day in her honor since her name was Lily, and this was my quiet tribute to her.

Later on that day, I remember the sound of loud laughter as my nieces played, hot tea and coffee, the family gathered together around the table. After lunch I was busy cleaning up in the kitchen when I caught a glimpse of my father-in-law setting up a game of backgammon with a cousin. And I thought to myself, this is Thanksgiving, and this is family. That day was a good, happy day and I gave thanks for it.

All of that said, I also think the amount of time I spent in the kitchen to make sure everything was served at the right time was a little too much. It kept me away from making more memories with my family. So, I decided to come up with ways to ease up the load on Thanksgiving. Here are a few tips:

1. Write down a plan-Write down who is coming so that you'll know how much food to prepare. Write down what you will need to buy and check the items off the list. Give yourself enough time to prepare, so that it doesn't pile up and become overwhelming.
2. Ask guests to bring a dish or side dish. Most people will be more than happy to be included in the preparations for that day, and you will have more time to attend to everything else that goes into entertaining for that day.
3. Finish your shopping as early as possible. Don't wait till the last day for groceries or your turkey. The stores will be chaotic and chances are they will be out of your favorite items. Take advantage of on-line shopping and apps such as Instacart and Google Express. If at work, they will most likely deliver to your place of work and you can leave most of the groceries in the car until you get home.
4. Make as many dishes or deserts in advance as you can. Remember! don't set the bar too high for yourself. Thanksgiving is a day for you to enjoy as well. There is nothing wrong with preparing part of the food the day before, and finishing it up on Thanksgiving. Another great trick would be to buy the desert at a store, and dressing it up or decorating it at home. If you have children, you can give them a small decoration project to do. They will also be happy to be included and it will be cute.

It's always better for the guests to remember a happy host and hostess than an exhausted one.

5. Remind yourself and your spouse to put family issues and sensitivities aside for that day and be more forgiving than usual. Do not engage in financial or political issues beyond a simple discussion. Remove yourself from the conversation or change the subject if you notice it's turning into an argument.

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6. After the meal is served, graciously accept help from family in clearing the table. That said, make sure you don't spend a whole lot of time cleaning up as it will make your guests feel unattended to. Leave some things for after the guests are gone or even the next day. Your kitchen doesn't have to turn back to spotless right after the meal.
7. Last but not least, remember to sit with the family after the meal, share stories and memories. This will also give the children in the family a chance to learn more details about the family and its history. Express your gratitude towards each other and pray for another wonderful year, for yourself and the whole world.

It's fair to assume that most of us are going to over-eat on Thanksgiving. I think that is okay as long as it doesn't aggravate any health issues, such as diabetes. Don't feel guilty. Just make up for it the next day or the rest of the week. Enjoy your day! Have that second slice of pumpkin pie! Or if you really want to be more diet sensitive, prepare the meals more healthy so you can don't have to think about a second helping. Here is an example of a Thanksgiving staple, made a little healthier, courtesy of the Food Network.

Green Bean Casserole with Crispy Shallots

Ingredients:

1/4 cup olive oil
6 medium shallots, sliced into rings (about 1 cup)
1 1/2 pounds thin fresh string beans or haricots verts, trimmed
1 pound button mushrooms, sliced
6 large cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
3 cups low-fat (1 percent) milk
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons freshly grated parmesan cheese
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
Salt and freshly ground pepper
Olive oil cooking spray
Add Checked Items To Grocery List

Directions

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Heat the olive oil in a small skillet over medium-high heat until very hot but not smoking. Add 1/4 cup shallots and cook, stirring, until golden brown and crisp, about 2 minutes. Transfer with a slotted spoon to paper towels to drain. Repeat with the remaining shallots, cooking 1/4 cup at a time. Reserve the oil in the skillet.

Place the green beans in a steamer basket fitted over a pot of boiling water. Cover and steam until bright green and still crisp, about 3 minutes.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the reserved shallot oil in a large, deep nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushroom liquid is evaporated and they begin to brown, about 12 minutes. Add the garlic and thyme and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Transfer the mushroom mixture to a bowl.

Whisk together the milk and flour until the flour is dissolved. Add the mixture to the skillet and, whisking constantly, bring to a simmer. Reduce the heat to medium low, whisking occasionally, until thickened, 10 to 15 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the green beans, mushroom mixture, 1/3 cup parmesan cheese, the parsley, nutmeg, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

Coat a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Spoon the green bean mixture into the

salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper.

Coat a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Spoon the green bean mixture into the prepared dish and sprinkle the top with the crispy shallots and the remaining 2 tablespoons cheese. Bake until golden on top and bubbling, about 20 minutes.

Recipe courtesy of Ellie Krieger for Food Network Magazine

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