

20 Fascinating Things You Never Knew About Thanksgiving

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Nov 6, 2018

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Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that tend to revolve around family and food. While those are definitely two of our favorite components, the important (and fascinating!) facts are often overlooked. Whether you're looking for an interesting conversation starter or just really want to know more about Thanksgiving, these surprising facts will make you seem like the smartest person at the dinner table.

1. The first Thanksgiving was actually a three-day celebration.

Today, Thanksgiving is one day — *maybe* two if you count Black Friday. But apparently the Pilgrims wanted to party even harder. Governor William Bradford organized the feast, inviting the Plymouth colonists' Native American allies. But it was only until the Wampanoag guests came and joined the Pilgrims that they decided to extend the affair.

2. It's unclear if colonists and Native Americans ate turkey at their feast.

There is truly no definitive proof that the traditional Thanksgiving entrée was even offered to guests back in 1621. However, they did indulge in other interesting foods like lobster, seal, and swan.

3. Today, a part of Plymouth, Massachusetts, looks just as it did in the 17th century.

Modeled after an English village and a Wampanoag home site, the historic attraction Plimoth Plantation stays true to its roots. You can order tickets as early as June to attend a Thanksgiving dinner complete with numerous authentic courses, tales of colonial life, and centuries-old songs.

4. While president, Thomas Jefferson refused to declare Thanksgiving as a holiday.

Presidents originally had to declare it a holiday every year. History says Jefferson refused because he strongly believed in the separation of church and state. Since Thanksgiving involved prayer, he thought making it a holiday would violate the First Amendment.

5. The woman behind "Mary Had a Little Lamb" is also responsible for Thanksgiving's recognition as a national holiday.

In 1863, writer and editor Sarah Josepha Hale convinced President Abraham Lincoln to officially declare Thanksgiving a national holiday that recurred every year. She wrote countless articles and letters to persuade the president — and the rest is history!

6. The first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade didn't feature any balloons.

But when the parade made its big debut in 1924, it did have something that might be even cooler than balloons: animals from the Central Park Zoo.

7. But we have a Good Housekeeping illustrator to thank for the parade's first balloons.

German American illustrator Tony Starg, who completed illustrations for *Good Housekeeping*, also had a passion for puppetry, which he used to make the amazing floats come to life in 1927.



A Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York, New York, as seen in the late 1920s.

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8. In 1939, Thanksgiving was celebrated on the third Thursday in November — not the fourth.

You might think President Roosevelt could predict the future, as he channeled a "Black Friday" mindset in making this decision. Even though the holiday had been celebrated on the fourth Thursday since its official recognition decades before, Roosevelt bumped it up a week — adding seven more shopping days to the holiday season. Americans, to say the least, didn't love the change, so it was officially (and legally) switched back in 1942.

9. A Thanksgiving mix-up inspired the first TV dinners.

In 1953, a Swanson employee accidentally ordered a colossal shipment of Thanksgiving turkeys (260 tons, to be exact). To get rid of them all, salesman Gerry Thomas came up with the idea of filling 5,000 aluminum trays with the turkey — along with cornbread dressing, gravy, peas, and sweet potatoes. The 98-cent meals were a hit. Within one year, over 10 million were sold.

10. About 46 million turkeys are cooked for Thanksgiving each year.

It's tradition, after all! And on Christmas, 22 million families host an encore with another turkey.



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11. But not everyone eats turkey on Thanksgiving.

According to the National Turkey Federation, only 88% of Americans chow down on turkey. Which begs the question, what interesting dishes are the other 12% cooking up?

12. You might consume up to 229 grams fat during the big meal.

We hate to break it to you, but that's about three to four times the amount of fat you should eat in a day. You're probably also wondering how many calories you might eat — and unfortunately an entire Thanksgiving meal could total over 3,000 calories.



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13. The turkeys pardoned by the President go on to do some pretty cool things.

President George H.W. Bush pardoned the first turkey in 1989, and it's a tradition that persists today. But what happens to the lucky bird that doesn't get served with a side of mashed potatoes? In 2005 and 2009, the turkeys were sent to Disneyland and Walt Disney World parks to serve as grand marshal in their annual Thanksgiving parades. And from 2010 to 2013, they vacationed at Washington's Mount Vernon state. Not bad!

14. Only male turkeys actually gobble.

You may have been taught in preschool that a turkey goes "gobble, gobble" — but that's not entirely true. Only male turkeys, fittingly called gobblers, actually make the sound. Female turkeys cackle instead.

15. Most Americans like Thanksgiving leftovers more than the actual meal.

Almost eight in 10 agree that the second helpings of stuffing, mashed potatoes, and pie beat out the big dinner itself, according to a 2015 Harris Poll.

16. The Butterball Turkey Talk Line answers almost 100,000 calls each season.

In 2016, the company's popular cooking crisis management team also introduced a 24-hour text message line for the lead-up into the big day.

17. There are four places in the country named Turkey.

The U.S. Census has identified another four called Cranberry, and a grand total of 34 dubbed Plymouth.

18. An estimated 50 million pumpkin pies are eaten on Thanksgiving.

But according to The American Pie Council, more Americans prefer apple pie overall — pumpkin only comes in second place.



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19. Black Friday is the busiest day of the year for plumbers.

Thanks to all that food we gobble up on Thanksgiving, Roto-Rooter reports that kitchen drains, garbage disposals, and yes, toilets, require more attention the day after Thanksgiving than any other day of the year.

20. 32 million people begin Black Friday shopping on Thanksgiving.

Even though many consumers think stores shouldn't be open on Thanksgiving, a good chunk of us still plan to shop on the holiday, according to the National Retail Federation. Black Friday draws the biggest crowd of the entire weekend though with 115 million people.