

Good gravy: You can make this well before the big day

By Susan Selasky
Detroit Free Press

Cooks are harried on Thanksgiving, so any dish they can make days in advance is highly welcome.

Consider turkey gravy, for example. Sure, you can make it the traditional way from the turkey pan drippings. It's great if you want to do that and have the time.

But sometimes making gravy can be a pain. What you're hoping for is glossy, smooth gravy, but what you end up with is a greasy, lumpy mess.

We've resolved to always make gravy in advance. It gives us a head start, and we love how it turns out. This is our favorite go-to recipe. Over the years, we've tweaked it a bit. One of the most important steps we added to the

recipe involves de-fatting the strained broth by putting it in the freezer. On Thanksgiving Day, you can also add pan drippings from your cooked turkey to enhance the gravy.

MAKE-AHEAD TURKEY GRAVY

Makes: About 8 cups / Preparation time: 10 minutes /Total time: 3 hours (not all active time)

Make this gravy up to 3 days in advance. It can also be frozen. The consistency is almost like gelatin, but will thin when you add turkey drippings to it.

4 turkey wings (about 3 to 4 pounds)
2 medium sweet onions, peeled, cut up

1 cup water
8 cups less-sodium, fat-free chicken broth, divided
1 large chopped carrot
½ teaspoon dried thyme, optional
¾ cup all-purpose flour
1 to 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Place the turkey wings in a roasting pan; scatter onions on top. Roast 1¼ hours or until wings are golden brown.

Put wings and onions in a large stockpot. Add water to roasting pan; stir to scrape up any brown bits on bottom and add all to the pot. Add 6 cups broth (refrigerate remaining 2 cups), the carrot and thyme if desired.

Simmer, uncovered, 1½ hours.

Remove the wings and cool. Once cool, remove and discard skin; reserve meat for another use. Strain broth into fat separator or into a bowl. Let sit 10-15 minutes until fat rises to the top. Pour de-fatted broth into a saucepan. You also can put the bowl in the freezer. The fat will rise to the top and become solid. What's left underneath will be jelled, which is what you want.

Whisk flour into remaining 2 cups broth until well blended and smooth. Bring broth in saucepan to a gentle boil. Whisk in flour mixture and cook 5 minutes to thicken gravy and cook out the raw flour taste. Stir in butter and season with pepper.

Cook's note: Freeze the gravy

up to 1 month. Thaw and re-heat. You can add fat-skimmed

drippings from a freshly roasted turkey.



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SOUP

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That's when leftover turkey soup would show up for me.

I associate that soup so closely with early winter that sometimes the smell of the first cold, cloudless night (mineral and biting with pure atmosphere) can make me crave it. And what rises to mind on a cold late-November afternoon as I sit working — my feet unable to keep warm — percolates out of my cells' deep memory and drifts alongside steam from a bowl set before a version of myself that vanished long ago. Food and its memory can erase time. Paying attention is the most basic form of magic.

A few Novembers ago, my family spent Thanksgiving at my sister's cramped New York City apartment. Once the hoopla was over and just she and I were left craving quieter and simpler meals, I remembered our mother's turkey soup. Neither of us had eaten it in years and our mom had passed away the winter before, so we worked from recollection. We put the carcass in a pot to simmer for the day and we strolled the Union

Square farmers market that crisp evening, the light fading too soon, until we found a beautiful frost-sweetened savoy cabbage. This soup is easy; by the time we got home it was nearly done. We stirred the three ingredients into the broth and lapped it up, our cheeks still red from the cold November air.

Broth is deceptive. Masquerading as a liquid, we expect thinness from it — light and delicate, it's easy to overlook. But in that simmering stockpot joints and bones, marrow and connective tissues release their molecular components into the water—invisible nutrients in a form our bodies can readily absorb. And when we drink broth, its nourishment passes easily through that cellular realm, nudging warmly against our spirits, soothing, it seems, our most unfathomable depths.

Eating our mother's soup far away from any place she ever made it, we both experienced the true allure of broth made with care, of brodo—it brought us back, it pulled her forward. Marveling at its simplicity, we both vowed to start making our own broth all year long. It's so easy, and it's so much more

than soup base. It's a room where things live—things you can't see until you taste them.

Start by saving the bones from dinner. Accumulate them in the freezer if you only generate a few at a time. Keep beef with beef, poultry with poultry, etc. or break the rules. Make broth with vegetables. With fish. Don't worry about mistakes and follow the simplest method that makes a broth you like.

Mine goes: cover the bones with cold water, bring it all to a simmer and then place the pot (cover and all) in a 180-degree oven. Forget about it for a day. For two. Make it conform to your schedule. When you're ready for it to be done, pull out the large bits with a slotted spoon and strain the small bits through a towel-lined colander. Cool it in the refrigerator and skim the solidified fat off the top (save that to cook with, or discard). Spoon it into jars for the freezer so you don't have to use it all at once.

Broth made from bones should be thick when cold, like sloshy Jell-o that thins to silky liquid when heated. Add it to sauces, to sautéed vegetables, cook beans in it, pour

it over gnocchi or ravioli, and, of course, make it into soup. See if it's worth the trouble. Maybe you'll go back to the cans or maybe, at the beckoning of your own cells, you'll find you can't live without it.



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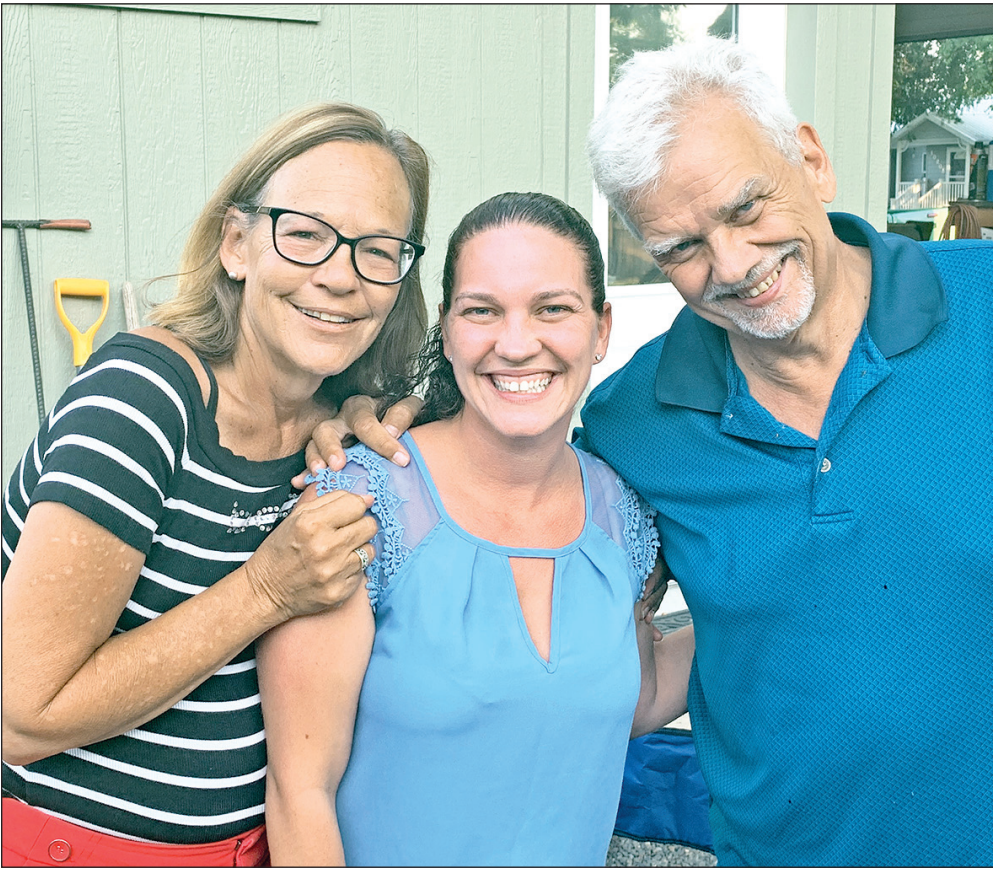
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Submitted photo

From left, Leah Baum, Rebecca and Rebecca's dad.

REBECCA

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But that was followed by such a happiness for Rebecca to have finally found me.

I responded to her email and sent my phone number. A long, exceedingly pleasant, phone conversation followed, the first of many.

I'm a bit ashamed I don't remember Rebecca's mom. Those were my hedonistic years between a divorce and my giving up drinking three decades ago. But even though I feel badly about those years I can't regret them because it led to this wonderful young woman who seems so strong, smart and driven.

Besides, as one of my favorite sayings goes, "I have given up all hope of having a

better past."

Rebecca offered to pay for a DNA test to prove I was the one. I said there was no need. One look at her and just a few minutes on the phone convinced me. Besides, the other DNA didn't lie.

Last July, just before her birthday, Rebecca and Evan came for a visit. My daughter Brandi, her husband and two young boys came, too.

We went to Catherine Creek State Park and a barbecue on my deck. The big event was a "welcome-to-the-family" picnic in the backyard of my niece, Joni.

My sisters and brother were there. So were an assortment of some of my many other relatives who live around here. It was a big success.

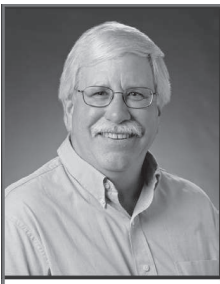
Rebecca was a little overwhelmed but was gamely cheerful throughout, even when some of my more inquisitive relatives peppered her with questions.

After dinner in a Mexican restaurant, Rebecca and Evan left for Florida. But Rebecca and I text every few days and talk on the phone regularly. She really is quite a young woman. We hope to go to Florida for a visit in the next year or so.

As I said, I felt so much joy for Rebecca for finding her dad and, hopefully, finding that he's not such a bad guy after all.

But now I find that, while I'm happy for her, I'm just as happy for me.

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