

Don't settle for dull gravy. Learn how to crank the flavor

By SARA MOULTON
Associated Press

Just because Thanksgiving mostly is about tradition doesn't mean that we aren't open to going off script when it comes to side dishes and exactly how to cook the big bird.

But the gravy? It's where innovation goes to die! Generally, we're content to just pour some store-bought chicken broth, along with a little butter and flour, into the pan in which the turkey was roasted, then call it a day. In truth, I love a pan gravy as much as anyone, but you can make a much more exciting gravy with just a little more work.

We were taught in cooking school that your sauce will only be as good as the liquid you add to it. In the case of turkey gravy, that would be turkey broth. What can be done to amp up its flavor?

To start, you want to brown the turkey parts that have been packed inside the bird — the neck and the giblets (that is, the heart and the gizzards). Then, slice off the bird's wings — which nobody eats anyway — and add them to the other parts. (Do not add the liver; it will make the stock bitter. Instead, just reserve or freeze it until you can saute it in butter and serve it on toast. Yum!)

Browning these turkey parts, in the company of some carrots and onions, develops complex flavors. This is called the Maillard reaction. It's what happens when amino acids combined with the sugars found in meat and many vegetables are heated above 300 F. Concentrated juices from these ingredients will collect in the bottom of the pan as you brown them. When you deglaze the pan, you dissolve those



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Simple pan gravy pan gravy is great, but you can make a much more exciting gravy with just a little more work.

juices and add them to the browned ingredients, further deepening the stock's flavor.

You may be surprised to find tomato paste among this recipe's ingredients, but tomatoes happen to be a terrific source of umami. Umami is the fifth taste, after sweet, sour, salty and bitter. It is usually described as "meaty." The carrots in the stock also contribute umami. Briefly sauteing the tomato paste in the skillet helps to brown it and develop its natural sugars.

Having cooked up your stock in a separate pan, you're eventually going to want to add to it the juices that streamed out of the turkey while it roasted and use the fat that accumulated in the pan while you basted the bird. Again, this is how you intensify the gravy's turkey flavor.

By the way, don't despair if your turkey is missing the happy little package of giblets and neck bone usually found inside the cavity; you'll still have the turkey wings. Just cut them off and supplement with some chicken wings. You'll need about eight ounces of poultry parts in total. Finally, I recommend making the turkey stock a day or two in advance of the feast. It will make the big day itself a little less stressful.

Sara Moulton was executive chef at Gourmet magazine for nearly 25 years, and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows. She currently stars in public television's "Sara's Weeknight Meals" and has written three cookbooks, including "Sara Moulton's Everyday Family Dinners."

BIGGER AND BETTER TURKEY GRAVY

Start to finish: 4 hours 15 minutes (35 minutes active)

Makes: 5 cups

- The neck, wings and giblets (about 8 ounces total) from an 18- to 24-pound turkey
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, medium chopped
- 1 medium carrot, medium chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 6 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 celery stalk, coarsely chopped
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- The drippings, 1/2 cup fat and pan juices from an 18- to 24-pound roasted turkey
- Butter, melted (if there is not enough fat from the roast to make the gravy)
- 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons instant flour (such as Wondra)
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper

Carefully chop the neck and wings into 1-inch pieces and pat them and the giblets dry. In a large skillet over medium-high, heat the oil. Add the turkey pieces and giblets, reduce the heat to medium and cook, stirring occasionally, until they are golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the onion, carrot and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are golden brown, about 5 minutes.

Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Transfer the mixture to a medium saucepan and add 1 cup of water to the skillet. Deglaze the pan over high heat, scraping up the brown bits with a spatula, until all the bits have been dissolved. Pour the mixture over the turkey parts in the saucepan. Add the chicken broth and 2 cups water to the saucepan.

Bring the liquid to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook, skimming the scum that rises to the surface with a skimmer or slotted spoon, until there is no more scum, 15 to 20 minutes. Add the celery, thyme and bay leaf, then simmer gently for 2 hours. Strain the stock through a colander, pressing hard on the solids. Discard the solids and measure the stock; you should have 4 cups. If you have more, return the liquid to the saucepan and simmer until it is reduced to 4 cups. If you have less, add water to the stock to make 4 cups. Cool, cover and chill until it is time to make the gravy.

When the turkey is cooked and resting on a platter, pour all the liquid in the roasting pan into a fat separator or large glass measuring cup. Pour or skim off the fat from the cup and reserve it; leave the cooking juices in the fat separator. You will need 1/2 cup of the fat for the gravy; if you don't have 1/2 cup, supplement with melted butter.

Set the roasting pan on top of 2 burners set over medium-low. Add the fat, followed by the flour. Whisk the mixture, preferably using a flat whisk, for 5 minutes. Add the reserved cooking juices from the roasting pan and two-thirds of the turkey stock. Bring the mixture to a boil, whisking. If the gravy needs thinning, add more of the turkey stock and the juices that accumulated on the platter where the turkey has been resting.

Reduce the heat to a simmer and simmer for 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Nutrition information 1/4 cup: 70 calories; 50 calories from fat (71 percent of total calories); 6 g fat (1.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 5 mg cholesterol; 170 mg sodium; 4 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 1 g sugar; 1 g protein.

MUSHROOM GRAVY

Proceed with the master recipe up to the point of adding the fat to the roasting pan. Add half the fat and 1/3 cup minced shallots and cook over medium heat, stirring, for 3 minutes. Add 8 ounces of assorted sliced mushrooms and 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are golden, about 5 minutes. Add the remaining fat and the flour and cook, stirring, for 5 minutes. Add 1/3 cup dry sherry, Madeira or tawny port, or 1/2 cup red wine, (this is optional; you can leave the alcohol out) along with the reserved cooking juices and two-thirds of the turkey stock. Bring the mixture to a boil, whisking. If the gravy needs thinning, add more of the turkey stock and the juices that accumulated on the platter where the turkey has been resting. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

MUSTARD-HERB GRAVY

Proceed with the master recipe up through the point of cooking the fat and flour for 5 minutes. Add 1/2 cup of dry white wine (this is optional; you can leave the alcohol out) along with the reserved cooking juices and two-thirds of the turkey stock. Bring the mixture to a boil, whisking. If the gravy needs thinning, add more of the turkey stock and the juices that accumulated on the platter where the turkey has been resting. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Whisk in 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard and 2 to 4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil, tarragon or sage. Season with salt and pepper.



AP Photo/Beth J. Harpaz

This Oct. 1 photo shows a taqueria and a giant head over a tiki bar on Fourth Avenue in downtown Tucson, Ariz.

Lots to do in Tucson's downtown

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — As a kid growing up in Tucson, Eddie Gallego remembers "when everything was downtown." Then businesses began to move out to the malls, and downtown suffered. Now, he says, the neighborhood has come full circle.

"Downtown has gotten so much better," said Gallego from behind the counter of his gift and craft shop, Tolteca Tlacuilo. "We're revitalizing."

Tolteca Tlacuilo is located at Old Town Artisans, a restored 19th-century marketplace in Tucson's El Presidio historic district. The Presidio is one of several distinct areas downtown that can make for a terrific afternoon enjoying Tucson's historic sites and the arts. Here are some recommendations.

El Presidio and El Barrio

El Presidio's historic district is where the 18th-century walled settlement that grew into Tucson was originally located. Today you'll see a reconstructed Spanish fort at 196 N. Court St., adobe and brick homes on side streets, and the mosaic dome of the Old Pima County Courthouse at 115 N. Church Ave., surrounded by a lovely park.

Across the street from the courthouse is the Tucson Museum of Art. In addition to notable Latin American, pre-Columbian and American West collections, the museum is hosting a Day of the Dead-themed installation called "Banda Calaca," with a large-scale seven-piece skeleton band marching toward a community memorial altar. Tucson is known for its Day of the

Dead celebration, the All Souls Procession, typically attracts 100,000 people.

Congress Street

Congress Street is hopping with venues both classic and new. The historic Hotel Congress has a real working pay phone in the lobby — yes, with a dial! — but there's nothing old-fashioned about its bloody mary bar, where options for your drink range from artichokes to goat cheese. The Rialto Theatre has hosted everyone from The Lumineers to Merle Haggard.

For some innovative treats, try the Hub Ice Cream Factory, where flavors include bourbon almond brittle, Mexican wedding cookie, vanilla lavender and brandied cherry goat cheese.

Fourth Avenue

An underpass leads from Congress Street to funky Fourth Avenue. Storefronts house a food co-op, the Hippie Gypsy, vintage clothing stores, shops selling books, gifts, crafts and art, and The Hut, where a 35-foot-high tiki head draws folks for tropical drinks and live music. Tucson's streetcar, the Sun Link, runs along Fourth Avenue and is popular with students from the nearby University of Arizona campus.

If you need a classy end to a busy day, head for Agustin Kitchen. The restaurant is located at Mercado San Agustin, an open-air courtyard located west of Interstate 10 in the Menlo Park neighborhood at the very edge of downtown, at the last stop of the Sun Link. It's a great spot for cocktails, small plates and other fresh, flavorful food.

Still no cranberry sauce fan? Maybe bacon will convert you

By J.M. HIRSCH
AP Food Editor

Admittedly, I'm a bit of a freak when it comes to cranberry sauce. Nonetheless, I can't help but think there is something seriously disturbed about people who claim to not like it.

Because what is there to dislike? Whether shpopped (that's the official sound) from

BACON AND FRIED ONION CRANBERRY SAUCE

Start to finish: 20 minutes
Servings: 12

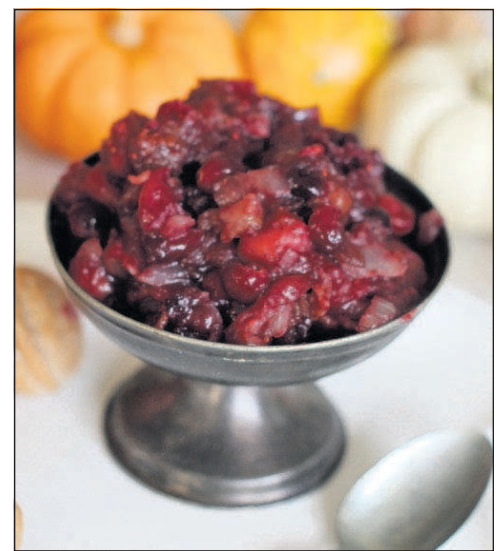
- 1 pound bacon, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 1/2 cup orange juice
- 12-ounce bag fresh or frozen cranberries
- 1 large or 2 small apples, peeled, cored and diced
- 1/2 cup sugar
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper

In a large saucepan over medium-high, cook the bacon until lightly crisped, 10 to 12 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a plate and set aside, leaving the saucepan and bacon fat over the heat. Carefully add the onion and cook until lightly fried, 2 to 3 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the onions to the plate with the bacon.

Dispose of the fat in the pan, but don't scrape the pan. You want any browned bits on the bottom.

Return the pan to the heat. When the pan is hot, carefully add the orange juice and bring to a simmer while using a wooden spoon or silicone spatula to scrap up the bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the cranberries, apple and sugar, then bring to a simmer. Cook until the cranberries pop and the juice thickens, about 6 minutes. Return the bacon and onions to the pan, then taste and season with salt and pepper. Cool before serving.

Nutrition information per serving: 210 calories; 140 calories from fat (67 percent of total calories); 15 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 25 mg cholesterol; 290 mg sodium; 15 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 11 g sugar; 5 g protein.



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

Enhance your cranberry sauce with the one food most people are powerless to resist, bacon.

a can or homemade with loving care, cranberry sauce is sweet and tangy and just a little spicy and mouth puckeringly luscious in every way. I don't actually care about the rest of the Thanksgiving meal. Just give me a bowl of cranberry sauce, a spoon and leave me alone.

Many years ago — in a bid to win over the faithless, including my son — I spent a good deal of time perfecting what I then considered to be the Platonic ideal of cranberry sauce. It was chunky and sweet with just the right amount of tart. It had fresh cranberries and dried cherries, chopped pears and candied ginger, golden raisins and apple cider. And the secret ingredient? Cardamom.

It was heaven.

And yet it still didn't win over my son. Or, it would seem — based on the number of cranberry sauce naysayers I encounter around this time each year — plenty of others.

So I shall try again. This time, I shall deploy a new weapon. I'm going to enhance my cranberry sauce with the one food most people are powerless to resist. The one food that can improve anything it touches. The one food that adds savory and sweet and rich and bold and chewy and crunchy all at once.

This time, I'm calling in the bacon. See if you can resist.

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