

Dining by Design

THANKSGIVING REFLECTIONS

THEN AND NOW



By Becky McKinley
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What a crazy question to ask

anyone, do you remember 2020? The year that seemed to skip whole seasons? I still find myself asking, “What ever happened to spring, summer, and fall that year?” It all seems to have been a blur. Suddenly or not so suddenly it was

November, and we were all trying to figure out how to make Thanksgiving feel normal in a world that wasn’t. Searching for supplies, substituting ingredients and hoarding toilet paper...*who could forget?*

Time has passed—and I find myself revisiting that moment when Thanksgiving took on a new meaning. It wasn’t just about the food (though we’ll always talk turkey), but about resilience, creativity, and connection in new forms. That strange year reminded me that whether we’re gathered around a long family table or a small circle of friends, the act of giving thanks is what truly endures.

Back then, one of my friends confessed she’d never cooked a turkey. Her family always celebrated at their ranch, potluck style. That conversation inspired me to write down my own family’s Thanksgiving traditions and tips—partly to help those new to the kitchen, and partly to preserve a little family history for my children, who were hosting their own first feasts.

As any cook knows, Thanksgiving isn’t just a meal—it’s a production. But it’s also an act of love. So, whether you’re a seasoned host or trying your hand at gravy for

the first time, here’s a little wisdom gathered from my table to yours.

I feel it is my duty to share these recipes every few years. They are easy and a family tradition at our house. So here we go - years after the original column was published. I hope you enjoy. We always do.

THE STAR OF THE SHOW

PERFECT ROASTED TURKEY

Let’s start where every Thanksgiving does—with the turkey.

I’ll admit something: I can’t tell much difference between a fresh bird and a frozen one. (There, I said it.) What matters is technique, and mine has been perfected over 60 years—passed from my mother’s kitchen to mine, and now to yours.

Once the bird is unwrapped, remove the giblets and neck (save them for gravy) and pat it dry. I like to season my turkey with a blend of fresh sage and rosemary, mashed into softened butter with a touch of Lawry’s Seasoned Salt. Rub this mixture over the bird’s dry skin—it’s messy but magical.

I never stuff my turkey; it roasts more evenly when the dressing is baked separately. For moisture, tent the breast with foil or drape it with a butter-soaked towel during the first half of cooking, then remove it to let the skin crisp beautifully. Baste every 40 minutes, and don’t rush the rest period—let it sit an hour before carving.

ROASTING GUIDE (325°F)

8–12 lbs.....	2¾–3 hrs
12–14 lbs.....	3–3¾ hrs
14–18 lbs.....	3¾–4¼ hrs
18–20 lbs.....	4¼–4½ hrs
20–24 lbs.....	4½–5 hrs

Cook until the thigh reaches 175–180°F, and you'll have the juiciest bird imaginable.



A TEXAS TRADITION CORNBREAD DRESSING

In the Texas Panhandle, we're cornbread dressing people through and through. While my northern friends use white bread, I combine fresh cornbread with Stouffer's seasoned mix for a balance of texture and nostalgia. The gravy? A little unconventional—yes, I use canned soup and cornstarch—but it's rich, velvety, and irresistible. Sometimes, you just don't mess with perfection.

1 large onion, chopped	1¼–2¼ C. chicken stock
4 celery stalks, chopped	½ C. turkey drippings
1 T. olive oil	1 stick melted butter
5 C. crumbled cornbread	1 tsp. salt
1 pkg Stouffer's seasoned stuffing mix	¼ tsp. pepper
	2 T. (or more) ground sage

Sauté onion and celery in olive oil until tender. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl, mix gently, and pour into a greased 9x13-inch dish. Bake uncovered at 350°F for 30 minutes. Serve warm with giblet gravy.

THE FAMILY SECRET GIBLET GRAVY

Our family's gravy is a little different—thickened with cornstarch instead of a roux, smooth and flavorful every time.

All turkey pan drippings	3 T. cornstarch mixed with
6 C. chicken stock	3 T. cold water
4 bay leaves	3 boiled eggs, sliced
1–2 cans cream of chicken soup	Chopped cooked giblets

Bring stock and bay leaves to a boil, whisk in soup, then slowly add the cornstarch slurry until thickened. Stir in eggs and giblets before serving, and don't forget to fish out the bay leaves. Simple, silky perfection.

LEIA'S SWEET POTATO CASSEROLE

At our table, this is the dish that blurs the line between side and dessert. My niece Leia's sweet potato casserole is warm, spiced, and crowned with a buttery pecan crumble.

Sweet Potato Mixture

4 large sweet potatoes,
boiled and mashed
½ C. sugar
2 eggs, beaten
½ tsp. salt
4 T. butter
½ C. evaporated milk
1 tsp. vanilla
½ tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp nutmeg

Topping

1 C. brown sugar
¾ C. flour
6 T. butter, softened
1 C. chopped pecans

Combine the sweet potato ingredients, pour into a 9x13-inch pan, and top with the crumble. Bake at 325°F for 30 minutes, or until golden. Serve warm, and prepare for silence around the table—always a good sign.

MOM'S CRANBERRY RELISH

This is more than a side—it's a memory. Sweet, tangy, and bright, it's the taste of every Thanksgiving past.

2 oranges, peeled and diced	1 C. sugar
2½ C. fresh cranberries	1½ C. chopped celery
3 (3 oz) pkgs. orange Jell-O	1 C. crushed pineapple, undrained
2 C. boiling water	½ C. toasted chopped pecans
1 C. ice cubes	
2 T. lemon juice	

Pulse cranberries and oranges together in food processor until coarsely chopped. Dissolve Jell-O in boiling water, add ice cubes to cool, then stir in all remaining ingredients. Chill until set. It's vibrant, festive, and simply beautiful on the table.

| Continued on next page

CRANBERRY MARTINI SPRITZ

Every feast deserves a signature cocktail. This one is as pretty as it is delicious—sparkling, tart, and the perfect pre-dinner toast.

1 C. sugar
1 C. fresh cranberries
1 C. water
1 (750 ml) bottle good vodka
1 C. cranberry juice (try POM)
¼ C. triple sec
¼ C. fresh lime juice
Chilled pink champagne

Simmer sugar, cranberries, and water until the berries pop. Cool, then combine with vodka in a large container and refrigerate up to a week. Strain, mix with cranberry juice, triple sec, and lime juice. Shake with ice and pour into martini glasses. Top each with a splash of champagne and a few boozy cranberries for garnish.

ADVICE FOR FIRST-TIME COOKS

- Set your table early—it sets the tone.
- Make a plan and take notes.
- Shop ahead; the last-minute rush is never worth it.
- Thaw your turkey in advance—up to a week in the fridge.
- Coordinate oven space; rest your turkey at least an hour before carving.
- Sauté onions and celery early and freeze them for dressing.
- Crumble cornbread up to three months ahead and freeze.
- Prep cranberry martinis a week ahead or freeze a month ahead.
- Bake potatoes and sweet potatoes two hours before serving and store in a Yeti cooler.
- Make your cranberry relish a day or two before.

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A FINAL THOUGHT

Thanksgiving still feels like both a comfort and a miracle. Whether you're setting your table for two or twenty, remember—it's not just the turkey that makes the day special. It's the stories, the laughter, and the familiar dishes that remind us who we are and where we came from.

Here's to good food, old recipes, and the joy of gathering—again. *AW*

A guide to dining out in Amarillo and the area, Chomp is a result of opinions and experiences of the Accent West staff. Publication of a listing cannot be purchased or influenced by advertising. Reviews of restaurants are by anonymous critics to ensure no special treatment. Accent West is always interested in hearing about new restaurants and/or entertainment enterprises. Ideas and comments should be sent to Chomp Editor, Accent West Magazine, Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Deadline is six weeks prior to date of publication. Price scales are for a typical meal for one person, excluding drinks, tax or tip as follows:

Inexpensive – under \$7.00

Moderate – \$7.00 to \$20.00

Expensive – over \$20.00

Café Moonwater, 3316 SW 6th Ave., 806-670-6116. Cozy tables, each styled distinctly in a delightful, eclectic atmosphere – invite diners to relax and refresh in a world away from the everyday. Superb, satisfying lunches include such amazing homemade delights as avocado toast, irresistible caprese salad, chicken salad (several tempting ways!), sandwiches, soups... and the oh-my-goodness desserts. Dine in or take it to go. After lunch, the enticing Moonwater home decorations and designs throughout the store must not be missed! 11:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., Tues-Sat. Moderate.

Chicken Salad Chick, 2620 Wolflin Ave., 806-808-0709. Comfortable, clean, efficient restaurant. Fresh chicken salad – made so many ways – yummy with pecans, apples and

grapes, but then try the zesty with ranch, bacon & shredded cheddar cheese, or with just the right diced jalapenos! The Lemon Basil is hard to resist too! Sandwiches, soup, salad – then there's pimento cheese and the signature sandwiches including the Turkey Club. Little Chick offerings and, for dessert – how about a Buttercream Frosted Flower Cookie, or a slice of pie, such as Pina Colada Pie?! Open for lunch, and on 'til 8 p.m. Dine-in, take-out, delivery. Moderate.

Sa-vor Tapas Bar, 7679 Hillside Rd., Ste 600, 806-310-2600. Definitely an upscale, social dining experience! Urban, chic, small bites, big flavor. So many delicious options to choose but do start with the charcuterie board – bold, fresh and delicious, especially with an imaginative cocktail. Select cold or hot tapas to your liking – such as the Mejillones (mussels), Albondigas (pork meatballs with manchego), roasted artichoke flatbread... the list goes on and on! Of course, there're are salads, and entrees –including prime beef, seared snapper, Rainbow trout. Wines are extraordinary. Don't miss the crème brulee for dessert! Open daily 11 a.m. – Midnight; Brunch (Sat & Sun) 10 a.m. -3 p.m. Moderate to expensive.

Sad Monkey Mercantile, 9800 TX-217, Canyon, TX 79015, 806-488-2658. Just 15 minutes from Canyon and 25 from Amarillo, Sad Monkey Mercantile is the perfect stop for a relaxing break on your way to or from Palo Duro Canyon. This unique spot offers everything from hot sandwiches and fresh local coffee to craft beer from

area breweries like Pondaseta Brewing Co., plus wine flights and mimosas at the Monkey Bar. The food trailer, open on weekends, serves delicious meals, while the pet-friendly patio with cornhole and occasional live music sets a laid-back vibe for all ages. Check out their Instagram for the latest on live music events. You'll also find camping gear, homewares, and "Panhandle Proud" merchandise to take home as souvenirs. With scenic views, a small dog park, and Texas longhorns nearby, Sad Monkey Mercantile offers a peaceful, family-friendly space to relax, grab a drink, and explore the best of the Texas Panhandle. Whether you're hiking, biking, or just looking to unwind, it's the perfect place to recharge. Open Sun – Thurs, 9 AM – 8 PM and Fri/ Sat, 9 AM – 9 PM. Moderate.

Six Car Pub & Brewery, 625 S. Polk Amarillo, Texas, 79101, 806-576-3396. Located in the heart of Amarillo, Six Car Pub & Brewery offers a vibrant atmosphere and a diverse menu that's perfect for any occasion. Whether you're craving a juicy burger, fresh salad, or delicious pizza, this local favorite has something to satisfy every palate. Their brunch menu is especially popular, making it a go-to spot for weekend relaxation. Family-friendly and welcoming, Six Car offers a kids' menu and provides high chairs for the little ones. The downstairs space is ideal for families, while the Rooftop Bar provides a more relaxed cocktail lounge vibe, best suited for adults seeking a quieter, more mature setting.

| Continued on page 46

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| Continued from page 43

Of course, the real highlight is the craft beer brewed on-site, alongside a selection of cocktails and spirits. The rooftop bar also serves as a perfect spot for enjoying drinks while soaking in the views. And for those looking to enjoy some live music, check out their Facebook or Instagram for updates on scheduled performances. With its relaxed ambiance, great food, and fun atmosphere for all ages, Six Car Pub & Brewery is a must-visit for both locals and visitors alike. Open Tues-Fri, 11 AM - 10 PM; Sat 10:30 AM - 10 PM; Sun 10:30 AM - 2 PM. The Rooftop Bar: Open Tues-Thurs 4-10 PM; Fri-Sat 4 PM - Midnight. Moderate.

The Brunch Truck, 213 SW 7th, 806-373-4199. Downtown Amarillo has a flavorful new addition worth the stop—**The Brunch Truck**, the city's latest food truck concept with a twist. While meals are prepped in the truck, guests enjoy the comfort of indoor dining just steps away, combining the charm of street food with the ease of a sit-down experience. Offering a fast-casual approach to breakfast and lunch, The Brunch Truck serves up an eclectic mix of morning favorites and midday staples. Think hearty breakfast burritos, fluffy pancakes, French toast, and the All-American breakfast alongside bold options like migas, tacos, burgers, enchiladas, salads, and sandwiches. Stop by for a quick bite that doesn't skimp on flavor—and stay for the fun, laid-back vibe that makes this local gem a standout. Lunch specials, Tues-Thurs (10 a.m. - 2 p.m.) Hours: Tues: 6:30 AM - 2 PM.; Wed-Fri: 6:30 AM - 7 PM; Sat-Sun Brunch: 9 AM - 3 PM. Call in orders for takeout. Moderate.

Tyler's Barbeque, 3301 Olsen Blvd., 806-331-2271. When a van with New York license plates is parked in front, it speaks well that folks would come that far to eat barbeque! Tyler

does know his way around smoked brisket, ribs, sausage, pulled pork and chicken. Step right into this Texas-comfortable restaurant and settle in for some great meals – plates, brisket sandwiches, specials – be sure to savor that great sauce – you might even want to take some home. And, don't miss the cobbler (or banana pudding)! Tuesday-Saturday. Moderate.

Hummer's Sports Café, 2600 Paramount Blvd, Suite B-2, (806) 353-0723. For over 40 years, Hummer's has been an Amarillo institution, serving up fresh, made-from-scratch burgers and cold beers in a fun, welcoming atmosphere. Founded by Amarillo native Ted Sanders in 1983, the restaurant has become a local landmark, beloved by both longtime regulars and new faces. Whether you're a "Used-To-Be," a "Will Be," or a "Wannabe," Hummer's is the place to meet friends, enjoy great food, and relax. Known for its hand-cut fries, onion rings, and fresh, never-frozen burgers, Hummer's prides itself on quality. Their chicken-fried steaks and ribeye steaks are made-to-order, ensuring every bite is as fresh and flavorful as possible. It's also the best spot in Amarillo to watch sports, with plenty of big screens throughout and a lively crowd of regulars at the bar. The fantastic wait staff makes sure

everyone feels at home, and the bar's atmosphere has earned it the title of Amarillo's version of 'Cheers' – a place where everyone knows your name. Whether you're here for a game, a cold drink, or a classic American meal, Hummer's delivers a consistently great experience that keeps locals coming back year after year. Open Mon-Thurs 11 AM - 10 PM; Fri-Sat 11 AM - 11 PM; Sun 11 AM - 10 PM. Bar open later. Moderate.

BORGER

Smitty Brothers All About Burgers, 3245 Fairlanes Blvd. 806-275-9107 Just off Hwy 136, west of Borger, sits a country-cozy stop made for hungry travelers. Family-friendly and laid-back, it's all about hearty, two-fisted burgers done right. Classics like the double cheeseburger and green chile burger never miss, but the standout is the **Triple "B" Burger**—topped with Kickin' Bourbon sauce, bacon, and your choice of cheese. For variety, try the avocado-topped **California Burger** or the smoky **Hickory Burger** with homemade BBQ sauce. Beyond burgers, there's crisp salads, golden chicken tenders, and catfish dinners. Don't skip the sides: hot, real-cut fries and irresistible onion straws seal the deal. Open for lunch 11 AM to 2 PM and dinner 4:30 to 8:00 PM, Mon - Fri. *AW*

Publication Title – ACCENT WEST. Publication no. 931-780. Filing date: October 1, 2025. Frequency: Monthly. No. of Issues Published Annually: 12. Annual Subscription Price: \$30.00. Complete mailing address of known office of Publication Complete (Street, City, County, State and Zip): 1233 S. Rusk St., Amarillo, Potter, TX 79102. Complete mailing address of headquarters or General business office of Publisher: P.O. Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Full names and complete mailing addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher (Name and complete mailing address): Liz Cantrell, P.O. Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Carolina Walden, P.O. Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address): Carolina Walden, P.O. Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Owner: Liz Cantrell, P.O. Box 1504, Amarillo, TX 79105. Known Bondholders, Mortgages and Other Security Holders: None. Owning 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds: None. Purpose has not changed during preceding 12 months. Issue date for circulation data below: October 2024 to September 2025. Paid Outside County Mail Subscriptions: 2736, 2744. Paid In-County Subscriptions: 787, 735. Paid circulation – sales paid through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales: 1240, 1279. Other classes mailed through the USPS: 0, 0. Total paid circulation: 4763, 4758. Free distribution Outside-County by mail: 0, 0. Free distribution In-County by mail: 0, 0. Free distribution mailed at other classes: 0, 0. Free distribution outside the mail: 0, 0. Total distribution: 4763, 4758. Copies not distributed: 237, 242. Total: 5000, 5000. Percent paid circulation: 95.26%, 95.16%. Paid Electronic Copies: 500, 550. Total Paid Print + Electronic Copies: 5263, 5308. Percent Paid (both Print + Electronic): 100%, 100%. This statement of ownership will be printed in the Nov. '25 issue of this publication. Signature and title of publisher: Liz Cantrell, 10-01-25.

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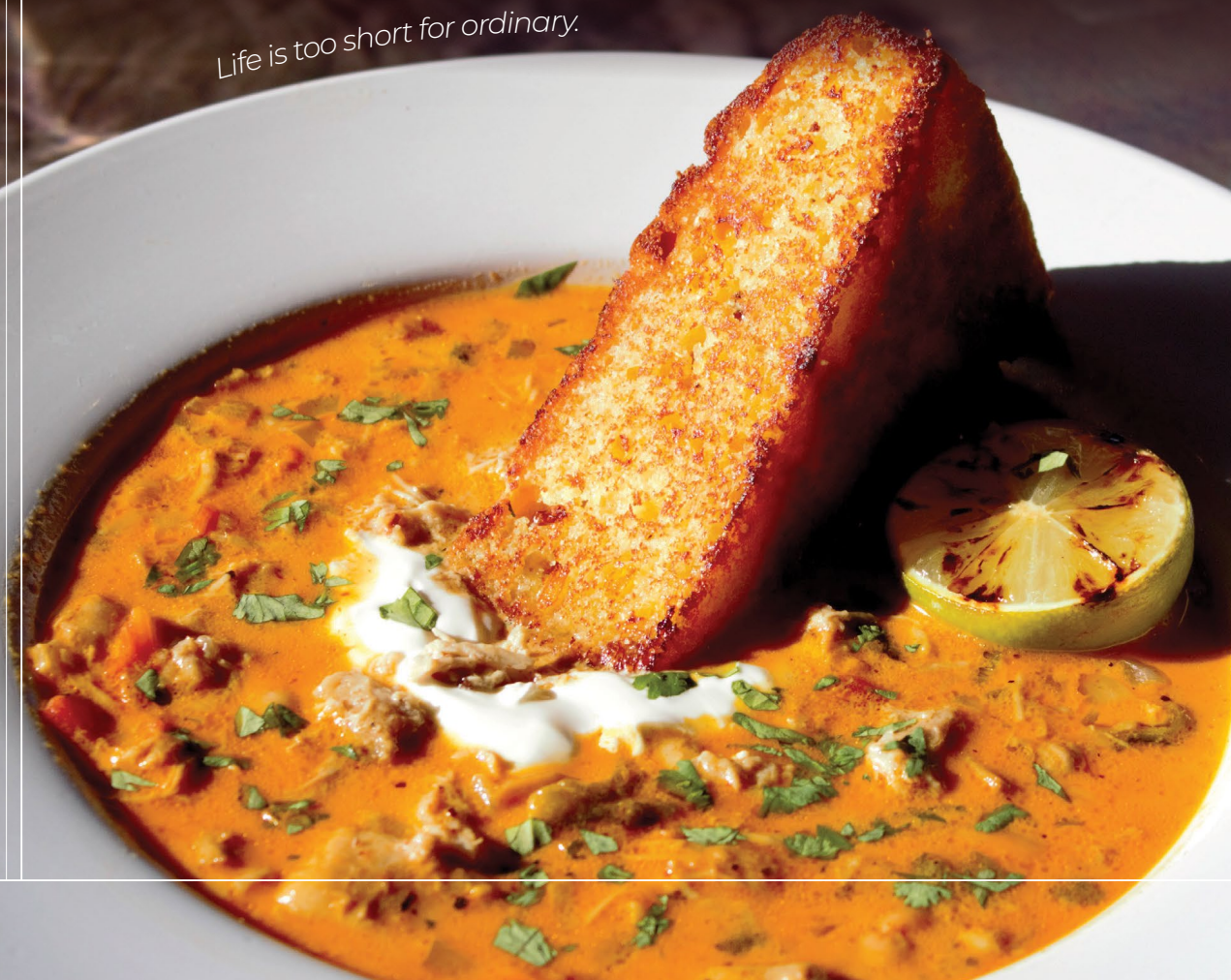
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