Better Homes & Gardens

The No. 1 Thanksgiving Rule Chefs Say You Can Break This Year

Thanksgiving is all about gratitude and tradition; however, there's some wiggle room to break typical Thanksgiving "rules" and start new rituals.

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Pumpkin pie. A little football and a lot of gratitude. Thanksgiving wouldn't be the same without certain traditions. That being said, doing and serving the same thing year after year can feel stale than the bread you transformed into stuffing.

“Thanksgiving is about eating delicious food and being accompanied by people that you are thankful for,” says Kyle Perkins, chef de cuisine at the Tides Inn in Irvington, Virginia. “As time progresses, we can eat what we are comfortable with. Food can change, but the meaning of Thanksgiving will always remain the same.”

So go ahead, sprinkle in a Thanksgiving trend or two, add a dash of your own personality, and feel free to break one of the Thanksgiving “rules” below. Some of the best chefs from coast to coast confirm that you’ll be thankful if you do.

6 More Thanksgiving "Rules" to Break

Now that we’ve eliminated the loudest “should” of all, the chefs have a few more customs they recommend calibrating.

4. Assembling a Beige Table

Although bursts of cranberries and green beans often join the canvas, the vast majority of the Thanksgiving essentials (stuffing, potatoes, rolls, turkey, and pie) are quite monotone. Traditional Thanksgiving menus are almost always extremely heavy, too, says Jacob Jasinski, executive chef and food and beverage director at The Chanler at Cliff Walk in Newport, Rhode Island.

“Break up the lineup with a fresh salad, like something featuring local cranberries, fennel, or lightly charred squash, to add brightness and keep the meal lively. Having these lighter and more colorful options on the table enhances the enjoyment of richer, heartier dishes, lending better balance and allowing people to go back for seconds without feeling too stuffed,” Jasinski explains.

Ziata sets a goal to introduce “something completely new each year to keep the menu fresh and interesting.” She’s fond of bright swaps, such as:

- Roasted root vegetables instead of mashed potatoes
- Mushroom and kale gratin instead of a traditional stuffing
- Pomegranate-Orange Cream Tart instead of pecan pie