

Happy Thanksgiving, Y'all!

By Melanie Mannarino Photography by Con Poulos

This menu of slimmed-down Southern favorites from James Beard Award-winning author and chef Virginia Willis embraces the spirit of the holidays with old favorites and delicious surprises.



When it comes to holiday cooking, Virginia Willis walks a fine line between lightening up classics and

delivering on everyone's expectations. "Cooking for Thanksgiving is not just about the bounty of the meal," says the author of *Lighten Up, Y'all*. "It's keeping everyone's psychological attachment to a particular favorite sacred." Amp up the health factor while keeping holiday traditions intact with tips from this Southern chef.

Make invisible swaps. "Most celebration comfort foods are really rich—there's always more butter involved than normal, or an extra blob of cream. But it doesn't have to be all or nothing: Trim a little here, a little there. For example, if a recipe calls for sour cream, I replace half with 2 percent or 0 percent Greek yogurt. Adjustments can be made without impacting the end result, and those small changes add up to a healthier dish."

Use big flavors. "Fresh ingredients taste so much better. Buy fresh whole sweet potatoes, not a can of yams. And if you're removing fat, add flavor

somewhere else. I've made a shift in my cooking to really focus on that umami flavor—it makes your mouth happy. Sweet potatoes respond fantastically to going savory, and the pears in this recipe add sweetness for people who expect that."

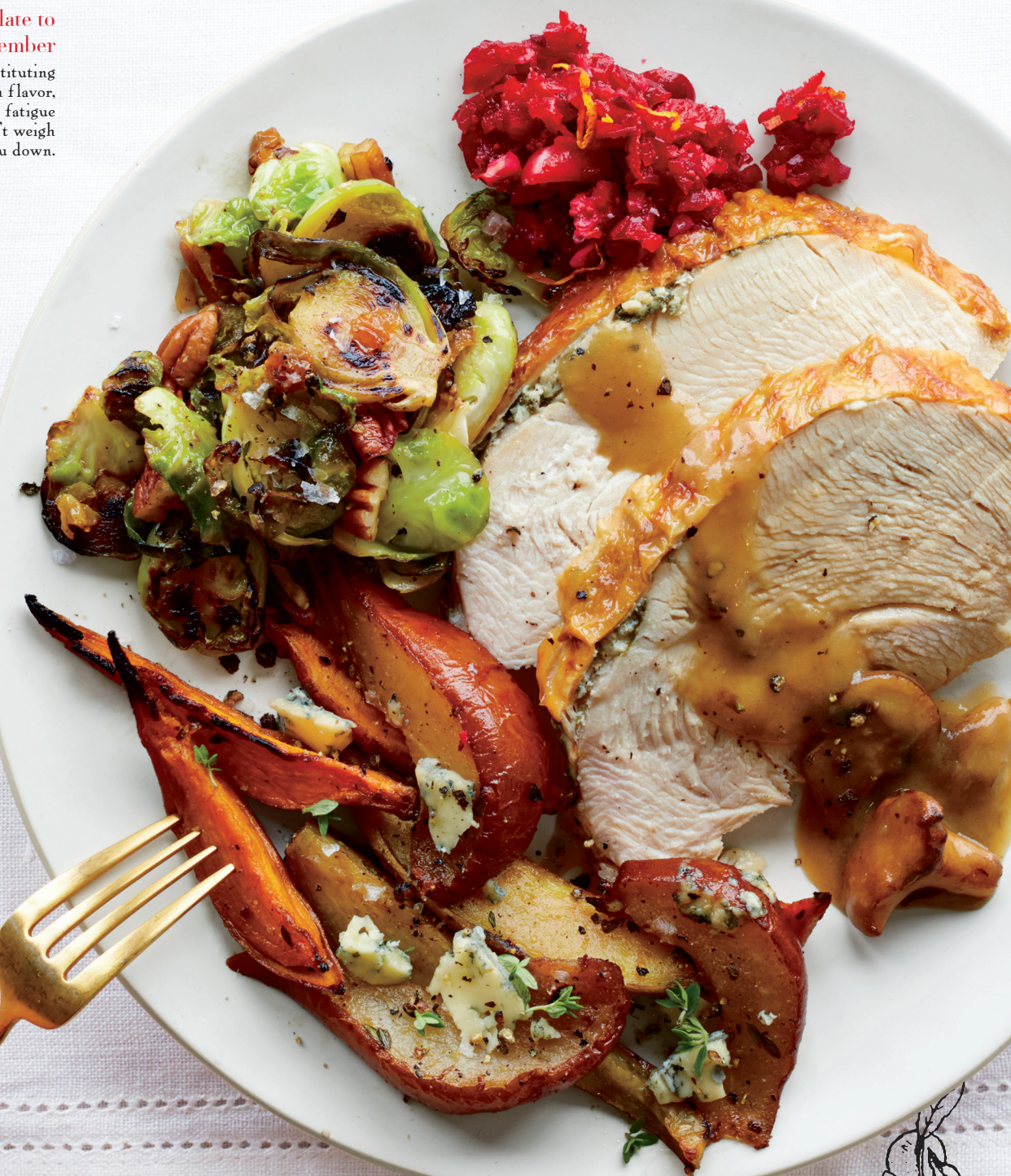
Rely on tools. "Instead of free pouring from a bottle of oil when cooking, I use a food-safe spray bottle with a trigger, and I know that three squirts is a teaspoon of oil. I'll squirt the skillet, then use a silicone brush to completely coat the bottom. The flavor truly doesn't suffer no matter what you're sautéing. You get delicious results."

Spread the love. "Pecans are a very traditional Southern nut. I find that leaving them out of a recipe is a miss, but you can use less by chopping them finer and spreading them out more. You take a bite and you get the hit of the crunchy pecan topping, but it's a more healthful amount."

Choose wisely. "There are certain flavors that only come with the presence of butter. By the time you mess around to make a pound cake healthier—using whole wheat flour, less sugar and butter—it's not going to taste like Mama's. I won't pass up something that's delicious just for the sake of saving a few calories. Instead, I'll adjust my portion size and increase my exercise."

A Plate to Remember

By substituting fat with flavor, post-feast fatigue won't weigh you down.





Roast Turkey Breast

Roasted Sweet
Potatoes
and Pears

Brussels Sprouts
with Raisins
and Pecans

Quick Orange-
Cranberry Relish

Mushroom
Gravy

Roast Turkey Breast

PREP 20 MIN // COOK 1 HR 15 MIN //
REST 15 MIN // SERVES 12

- 4 stalks celery, cut into 2-inch lengths
- 2 sweet onions, sliced
- ¼ cup white wine
- 4 garlic cloves, mashed into a paste with a pinch of salt
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves only, chopped
- 10 fresh sage leaves, chopped
- 2 (2½-lb) bone-in turkey breasts, with skin

1 Preheat oven to 350°F.

2 Place the celery, onion, and wine in the bottom of a large roasting pan. Combine the garlic, thyme, and sage. Loosen the skin from the meat gently with your fingers and smear the garlic-herb paste directly on the meat; place on the bed of vegetables. Transfer to the oven and cook until the temperature reaches 165°F when measured with an instant-read thermometer, about 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes.

3 Transfer the meat to a cutting board, preferably with a moat, and tent with aluminum foil. Let the meat rest and the juices redistribute for 15 minutes. Slice ½-inch thick and place on a warmed serving plate. Drizzle with some of the pan drippings. Reserve vegetables for another use, if desired.

PER SERVING (3 oz turkey): 234 cal, 11 g total fat, 3 g sat fat, 102 mg sod, 3 g total carb, 1 g sugar, 1 g fib, 29 g prot. **SmartPoints value:** 5

NOTE: Each 2½ lb bone-in turkey breast yields about 1½ lb meat with 1 lb bones, as well as 2 cups of vegetables/drippings mixture after cooking.

Brussels Sprouts with Raisins and Pecans

PREP 20 MIN // COOK 15 MIN //
SERVES 12

- 2 tsp olive oil
- 2 lb Brussels sprouts, trimmed, sliced ¼-inch thick
- 1½ tsp coarse kosher salt, or to taste
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 6 large garlic cloves, halved
- 2 c canned reduced-fat, low-sodium chicken broth
- ¼ c golden raisins, chopped
- 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- ¼ c chopped pecans

1 Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add sprouts and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sprouts begin to char and are still bright green, about 3 minutes.

2 Add garlic and cook until fragrant, 45–60 seconds. Add broth and raisins; cook, stirring occasionally, until pan is nearly dry and sprouts are just tender, 8–10 minutes. Add vinegar and pecans; stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper, if desired; serve warm.

PER SERVING (½ cup): 71 cal, 3 g total fat, 0 g sat fat, 341 mg sod, 11 g total carb, 4 g sugar, 3 g fib, 4 g prot. **SmartPoints value:** 1

Roasted Sweet Potatoes and Pears

PREP 20 MIN // COOK 30 MIN //
SERVES 12

- 4 large sweet potatoes, sliced, or 1 lb small sweet potatoes, cut ¼-inch thick
- 3 pears (such as Bosc), cored and cut ¼-inch thick
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves only
- 1 tsp kosher salt, or to taste
- ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 1 tsp sherry vinegar
- 2 oz crumbled blue cheese

1 Preheat oven to 350°F. Combine potatoes and pears in a 2-quart gratin dish or an ovenproof skillet. Pour butter over potatoes and pears, sprinkle with thyme leaves, and season with salt and pepper; toss to combine.

2 Transfer to oven; bake until potatoes are tender, gently stirring once, 25–30 minutes. Remove from oven, drizzle with vinegar, and sprinkle with cheese; stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper, if desired; serve immediately.

PER SERVING (½ cup): 139 cal, 3 g total fat, 2 g sat fat, 267 mg sod, 26 g total carb, 8 g sugar, 4 g fib, 3 g prot. **SmartPoints value:** 4

NOTE: Consider covering the dish while baking so potatoes will cook faster.

Mushroom Gravy

PREP 10 MIN // COOK 13 MIN //
SERVES 16

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 lb mixed mushrooms (such as cremini, chanterelle, morel, shiitake, and white button), sliced
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 2 c homemade chicken stock or reduced-fat, low-sodium chicken broth

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the flour and stir to combine. Add the mushrooms and salt and pepper. Cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Whisking constantly, add the stock mixture to the roux. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring constantly, and cook until the sauce thickens, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.

PER SERVING (2 Tbsp): 14 cal, 1 g total fat, 0 g sat fat, 130 mg sod, 1 g total carb, 0 g sugar, 0 g fib, 1 g prot. **SmartPoints value:** 0

Quick Orange-Cranberry Relish

PREP 20 MIN // CHILL 30 MIN //
SERVES 12

- Finely grated zest of 1 orange
- 1 orange, peeled, seeded, and coarsely chopped
- 1 jalapeño chile, cored, seeded, and chopped
- ½ c sugar
- 1 (12-oz) bag fresh or frozen cranberries (about 3 c)
- ¼ c walnut halves
- ¼ tsp kosher salt, or to taste
- Pinch freshly ground black pepper (optional)

1 Place zest, orange, and jalapeño in bowl of a food processor fitted with a metal blade; pulse until finely chopped. Add sugar and cranberries; continue to pulse until berries are coarsely chopped.

2 Add walnuts; pulse to combine. Season with salt and pepper, if using. Allow relish to chill for at least 30 minutes and up to 2 days. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

PER SERVING (¼ cup): 58 cal, 2 g total fat, 0 g sat fat, 41 mg sod, 11 g total carb, 8 g sugar, 2 g fib, 1 g prot. **SmartPoints value:** 2

NOTE

Recipes from Lighten Up, Y'all, by Virginia Willis, have been modified by Weight Watchers with permission.