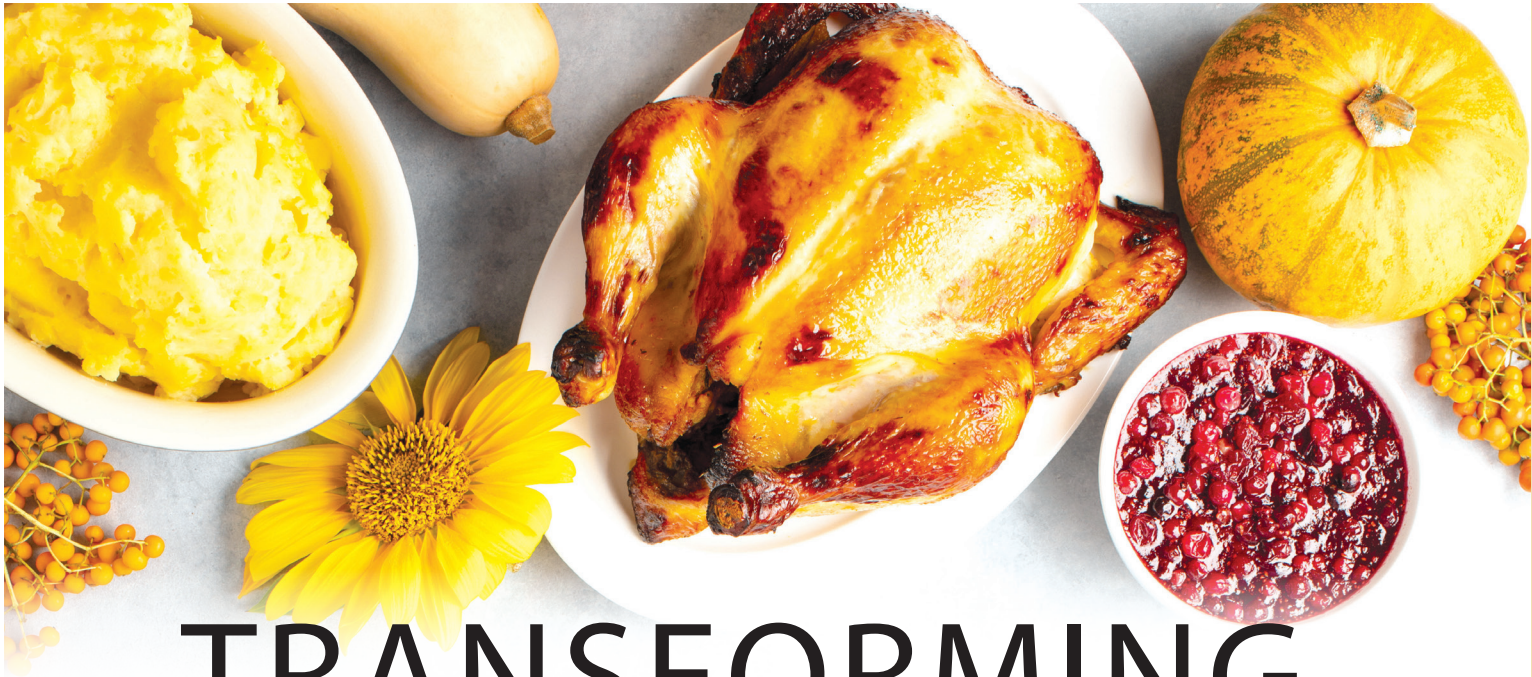


HOME style



TRANSFORMING TRADITIONS

Thanksgiving in flux, with 21% of hosts asking for help to cover costs

JESSICA HAGGARD
Food Drink Life via AP

On the surface, Thanksgiving looks the same: 89% of Americans plan to celebrate, and 84% will still center the meal around turkey. But beneath those numbers, a quiet transformation is happening.

Inflation and evolving family dynamics change the way people celebrate gratitude and togetherness. What are the alternatives, and how can families mark Thanksgiving in more cost-effective, meaningful ways?

WHEN TRADITION MEETS TIGHT BUDGETS

New surveys show even as many Americans scale back plans, the tradition of Thanksgiving remains deeply rooted. The Butterball Togetherness Report finds 89% of respondents plan to celebrate Thanksgiving this year. Turkey will remain the centerpiece of 84% of respondents' meals, and 58% will not change their menus.

Last year, 18% of hosts cut back on decor and 17% on extra side dishes, focusing mainly on non-food items rather than eliminating food itself. Meanwhile, many people are stepping back from the hosting role entirely, not out of disrespect for tradition, but because of the emotional, physical and financial labor involved.

While not everyone agrees on whether Thanksgiving is best spent around a crowded table or skipped altogether, one thing is clear: rising costs affect how we celebrate Thanksgiving. Americans are finding new ways to keep the holiday spirit alive without breaking the bank.

So, what does Thanksgiving look like when gratitude has to stretch as far as the budget? Let's take a closer look at the creative, cost-savvy alternatives on the rise.

TRY A POTLUCK-STYLE FEAST

Instead of one host covering the entire spread, consider turning your Thanksgiving into a potluck dinner. Guests contribute a dish or drink, which lightens the financial load and creates a more diverse table. It is a practical approach that makes the holiday more collaborative and less stressful for everyone.

One way to make this even smoother is to

set categories ahead of time. Assign sides, desserts or drinks, so no one feels pressured to overdo it and the table ends up balanced. This also lets guests showcase a favorite recipe while keeping the host from juggling too many details.

DOWNSIZE THE MENU

Thanksgiving does not have to mean an endless buffet of dishes. You could serve one main course with a few carefully chosen sides to keep things more manageable and reduce waste. A smaller menu can also make it easier to put care into each dish without feeling overwhelmed.

Additionally, no rule says the table has to follow tradition exactly. Some families swap out turkey for something unexpected, turning the meal into a new kind of tradition.

As Laura Sampson of Little House Big Alaska shares, "We have family members who don't care for traditional turkey, so we looked for an alternative. That alternative turned out to be beef Wellington. We'd never made it before, and now it's a bit of a family project, and everyone helps make it. It's fun and tasty, win-win."

HOST A 'FRIENDSGIVING' INSTEAD

"Friendsgiving" is a casual, potluck-style gathering shared among friends in place of, or in addition to, a traditional family Thanksgiving. It has become a popular alternative, especially among younger adults who may live far from their families or prefer a relaxed vibe. Each guest brings a dish, dessert or drinks, creating an affordable and festive atmosphere that celebrates connection without the pressure of formal hosting.

As Bella Bucchiotti of xoxoBella put it, "Since I live far from my family, I am not always able to be with them for the holidays. Friendsgiving has become such a wonderful alternative because it is relaxed, potluck style and way less pressure. Everyone brings a dish they love, and the table ends up full of surprises you would never see at a classic Thanksgiving dinner."

Sixty percent of Americans now attend more than one Thanksgiving celebration, including Friendsgiving. It is proof that the holiday can be meaningful even when celebrated outside traditional family circles.

MAKE BRUNCH THE NEW DINNER

Hosting a Thanksgiving brunch is a

growing trend that saves money and still feels festive. Eggs, baked goods and seasonal fruit are far cheaper than turkey and multiple side dishes. A mid-morning meal can also be easier to coordinate, especially for families with packed holiday schedules. It is a refreshing twist that delivers the spirit of Thanksgiving without the hefty grocery bill.

Brunch also allows for plenty of creativity. You can set up a DIY waffle or pancake bar, make a big batch of cinnamon rolls, and guests can bring their favorite coffee cake or breakfast casserole, keeping the potluck spirit alive but with lighter, more affordable dishes.

Plus, ending the meal before afternoon gives everyone more flexibility to visit other family gatherings, attend Friendsgiving or simply relax at home.

EMBRACE ALTERNATIVE CELEBRATIONS

Thanksgiving does not always have to center on a turkey dinner. Some families are opting for new traditions such as volunteering, outdoor hikes or game nights at home. These activities highlight gratitude and togetherness without the financial burden of hosting a large meal. Choosing experiences over food can refresh the holiday and make it more memorable.

A day of giving back at a local shelter or food bank, creating a gratitude jar for the kids, a walk in nature or setting up a family movie night can foster shared moments that are just as special as a big feast. The point is not the menu but the connection, and these alternatives can spark new traditions that feel authentic and joyful.

RETHINKING THANKSGIVING, ONE TABLE AT A TIME

Thanksgiving is no longer a one-size-fits-all tradition. Rising costs, shifting family dynamics and evolving lifestyles are the main reasons why we no longer celebrate the holiday like we used to. At the end of the day, there's no right way to celebrate. What matters is creating a tradition that feels authentic to you and your loved ones, even if that means rewriting the script altogether.

Jessica Haggard is the creator of the blog Quick Prep Recipes, which is dedicated to easy recipes for busy people who love good food. She offers simple recipes with minimal prep time, requiring no more than 10 ingredients with a straightforward step-by-step process. Her main goal is to help you prepare flavorful meals without hassle or spending hours in the kitchen.

ON THE MENU

Gretchen's table: Taylor Swift-inspired 'Lover' cupcakes help shake off sugary cravings

GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Taylor Swift is known for being a pretty good cook. She's especially famous for her homemade sourdough bread and chai sugar cookies, the recipe for which was posted to her Instagram way back in 2014 and has since been replicated by numerous amateur and professional bakers.

Thanks to the release of a new cookbook by Leechburg resident Lindsey Smith, Swifties will be able to expand their baking repertoire to include more than 50 sweet treats inspired by Swift and every era of her career.

"Bake It Off: An Unofficial Taylor Swift-Inspired Cookbook for Every Era, from Breakfast to Midnights" (Harvest, \$25) has recipes for just about everything a fan with a sweet tooth might want to munch on while listening to her music. Choose from cakes and cookies to pies, tarts, pretzels, croissants and other pastries.

LOVER CUPCAKES

- For cupcakes**
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter, softened
 - 3/4 cup sugar
 - 2 large eggs, room temperature
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla
 - 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
 - 1 1/4 teaspoons baking powder
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1/2 cup buttermilk, room temperature
 - Miss Americana frosting (recipe follows)
 - Cotton candy, for decorating
 - Colored sanding sugar, for decorating
- For Miss Americana frosting**
- 3 sticks unsalted butter, softened
 - 4 1/2 cups confectioners' sugar
 - 1/2 teaspoon salt
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla
 - 4-5 tablespoons whole milk or heavy cream

Make cupcakes: Set oven rack in the center position and preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Line the wells of a 12-cup muffin tin with cupcake liners, spray with cooking spray and set aside.

Place softened butter and sugar in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and cream together on medium-high speed until pale, light and fluffy, about 5 minutes.

Add eggs, one at a time, and continue beating, allowing each egg to incorporate, and scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed before adding the next.

Mix in vanilla.

Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl.

Reduce the mixer speed to low. Add 1/3 of the flour mixture, then 1/4 cup of buttermilk, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Continue alternating between the flour and buttermilk, ending with the flour.

Divide the batter evenly among the cupcake liners, filling each about 2/3 full.

Bake until lightly golden on top and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 20-25 minutes. Let the cupcakes cool for 5 minutes in the tin, then transfer them to a wire rack to cool completely.

Once the cupcakes are completely cool, apply frosting with a piping bag or a spatula and decorate with cotton candy and sprinkles.

Makes 12 cupcakes.

"Bake it Off: An Unofficial Taylor Swift Inspired Cookbook for Every Era, from Breakfast to Midnights" by Lindsey Smith

