OPERATION BBQ RELIEF

Cranberry-Brined Smoked Turkey

WHAT YOU NEED

20 lb whole turkey

Cranberry Poultry Brine

½ gal cranberry juice
¾ cup kosher salt
1 tbsp Bell's seasoning
1 tbsp black pepper
½ - ¾ gal water

Vegetable and Seasonings

1 large yellow onion, quartered
3 stalks celery, split down the center
3 peeled carrots, split down the center
1 box Bell's Seasoning BBQ Honey Rub or favorite rub, to taste

Gravy Pan

1 qt chicken stock
2 cloves garlic
1 cup white grape juice
1 green bell pepper, seeded and sliced
2 onions, quartered
3 carrots, chopped into 2" pieces
Celery seeds
Turkey neck
3 bay leaves
1 tsp Bell Seasoning
Dried thyme
½ cup butter

PREPARATION

1. Brine: In a large bowl, mix together all the ingredients for the brine.
2. Get a 5-gallon bucket or small cooler large enough to hold the bird. Line the container with an unscented plastic garbage bag. Place the bird in the bag and place the bag in the container. Pour the brine over the bird. Close the bag, shake the container and cover the closed bag with ice. Leave it overnight or for a minimum of 12 hours.
3. Two hours before placing your bird in the smoker, remove from the brine and rinse thoroughly, both inside and out. Expect the skin to take on an unusual cranberry/pink color from the brine. Do not worry: it will look normal when cooked.
4. After washing, dry the bird thoroughly and place in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to dry some more.
5. Vegetables and seasonings: Place the yellow onion, celery and carrots inside the cavity of the bird. Next, lightly sprinkle Bell's Seasoning on both the inside and the outside of the bird. Then, apply a medium coating of BBQ Honey Rub (or your favorite seasoning) to the exterior of the bird.
6. Tie or truss the bird.

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PREPARATION CONT.

7. Gravy pan: Place all of the pan ingredients in a pan. I like to use a 4-inch deep aluminum pan. Place the turkey in the smoker on a rack that keeps the bird above the gravy pan.
8. Smoke at 200°F for the first hour. After 1 hour, increase smoker temperature to 300°F. A rough estimate of total cooking time is about 15 minutes per pound.
9. After the first 3 hours, baste the bird every 30 minutes. About three-quarters of the way through the cook (roughly 3-4 hours depending on the size of the bird) you should check the skin. Once the skin is a golden brown, tent it with foil.
10. Continue cooking the turkey for about 1-2 more hours depending on the size of the bird. The bird is done when the center of the breast meat reaches 165°F. The legs and thighs will be up around 190°F. Once the bird reaches these temperatures, remove it from the cooker and let it rest in a cold oven or on a countertop. Strain the lovely concoction that is in the gravy pan and place the strained liquid into a smaller pot.
11. At this point you should turn your au jus into gravy. There are many ways to make gravy, so let's just state that this is the best gravy base ever tasted. You can season it how you like to make it your own. Let the bird rest for no more than 1 hour before carving and serving.

Yields 10-12 servings.

