

The history of turducken is nearly as complicated as the dish itself



How Thanksgiving's Most Decadent Dish Gained Popularity

When Anderson Cooper [interviewed](#) late celebrity chef and [ACF member](#) Paul Prudhomme, [HAAC](#), [HHOF](#), about the appeal of turducken — a deboned chicken placed inside a deboned duck placed inside a deboned turkey, cooked with stuffing between each layer — he proudly

described it this way, as a display of his Thanksgiving masterpiece sat on the table in front of him: “It’s one of those wonderful things that, when you serve it — whether it’s on Thanksgiving or any other holiday, or just a good regular Sunday with the family — people anticipate it because it’s unusual, it’s wonderful, it has a great taste. It has more than one flavor and those flavors match, so it really gives it a great wonderful celebration, I feel it.”

It’s said that Prudhomme not only felt it, he invented it. Legend has it that Prudhomme created the decadent dish while spending time at a lodge in Wyoming, and he went on to make it a part of the menu at his New Orleans restaurant K-Paul. But was he really the first one to conjure up the turducken?

Like the dish itself, the origin of turducken is complicated.

While it is clear that Prudhomme obtained a trademark on the name “turducken” in 1986 and featured his recipe in a 1987 cookbook, *The Prudhomme Family*

Cookbook: Old-Time Louisiana Recipes by the Eleven Prudhomme Brothers and Sisters and Chef Paul Prudhomme, he may not have been the first one to actually create it.

According to brothers Junior and Sammy Hebert, who own a butcher shop in Maurice, Louisiana, they invented turducken back in 1984 when a farmer came into their business with a turkey, a chicken, a duck, and an odd request: to have the birds stuffed inside each other. The butchers granted this wish and added some cornbread [dressing](#) to the mix before sewing their creation up. They even claim they coined the name turducken and to this day, they still sell it during the holiday season.

A Long-Time Tradition of Bird Stuffing

Turducken may have been introduced to the public sometime in the 1980s, but the practice of stuffing birds inside each other, also known as engastration, has a much longer history.

For example, those who think the three-bird combination of turducken is a bit over the top would probably be on the verge of heartburn by just reading the recipe for [rôti sans pareil](#), a dish created by French gastronome Alexandre Balthazar Laurent Grimod de la Reynière in the 1800s that translates to “roast without equal.” It lives up to its name. Making turducken seem downright restrained, this creation includes a whopping 17 stuffed birds — bustard, chicken, duck, garden warbler, goose, guinea fowl, lapwing, lark, ortolan bunting, partridge, pheasant, plover, quail, teal, thrush, turkey and woodcock.

Similarly, in a much less intimidating incarnation of engastration, the Yorkshire Christmas Pie described in *The Art of Cookery* published in 1774 includes a fowl, goose, partridge and pigeon stuffed into a turkey.

Putting Turducken on the National Stage

Since football is such a staple of people's [Thanksgiving](#) routine, it's not surprising that turducken began to gain more popularity thanks to football announcer John Madden, who fell in love at first bite with the dish after being introduced to it in 1997. He began giving turducken rave reviews on the air during Thanksgiving NFL games. He once carved one on-air and even gifted the stuffed masterpiece to winning players.

No matter who invented turducken, it's clear that fans, celebrity and non-celebrity alike, love gracing their Thanksgiving table with the dish. You can buy turduckens at Costco and Whole Foods, among others. According to Time, "[o]ne store in Louisiana claims to ship more than 5,000 turduckens the week before [Thanksgiving]."

In that aforementioned CNN interview, Prudhomme sums up the way turducken enthusiasts feel about it: "Good cooking, good eating, good loving, that's what this turducken is!"

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