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An elegant lobster mac & cheese is a perennial favorite on the Thanksgiving menu at 555. “We’ll serve 300 four-course dinners, and even turn people away,” says chef and co-owner Steve Corry.

Leave it to the Professionals

Ever dream of not making the big turkey dinner at home?

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

If you’re feeling less and less like wrestling with a 20-pound turkey as T-Day approaches, you’re part of an emerging trend. Maine chefs are tapping into the growing interest in celebrating the holiday with family and friends in innovative, sparkling ways—without the KP duty.

Skip the bother, stay out of the kitchen, forget baking the pies, and head for a restaurant. Feasts await, with prices starting well under \$20 per person.

UPTOWN BIRD

“We go with an à la carte menu, not a buffet,” says Alan Cook, chef at the Portland Regency Hotel’s **Twenty Milk Street** restaurant for 25 years. “The hotel’s always full because it’s a long holiday weekend.” Dinner is served to hundreds between noon and 8 p.m.

“I like to do about six entrees. A rack of pork, a pumpkin risotto for vegetarians, maybe a strip steak. A squash or pumpkin soup to start, a green vegetable. I try to make everything as ‘fall’ as possible.”

And there’s turkey, of course? “Our

turkey’s *really* good. We raise our own on our farm.”

The Regency Hotel’s restaurant has a *farm*? And here we thought Masa Miyake was the only savvy city restaurateur raising livestock in the ‘burbs. As it turns out, the Regency’s turkeys are ranging free in a mighty nice zipcode.

“The farm’s in Cumberland,” says Cook. We raise Piedmontese cattle out there. We’re getting known for our Piedmontese beef. It’s why the burger tastes so good downstairs [in the Armory Lounge]. We raise turkeys for Thanksgiving, and we’ve also got chickens to provide us with eggs. Our bees let us harvest our own honey every year.” Which figures handily into pastry chef Amy Acheson’s dessert creations. “She does an assortment of pies—apple, pumpkin, chocolate, whatever strikes her fancy.”
20 Milk St., Portland. 774-4200 theregency.com

JUST ADD LOBSTER & TRUFFLES

“This year is our third serving Thanksgiving,” says Michelle Corry at chic **555**, which

she and her husband Steve opened in Portland in 2003. “It’s been huge. We do a fixed-price four-course, with choices. We’ve done traditional side dishes like oyster stuffing and green bean casserole; we’ve even done turducken. And lobster mac and cheese will always be on our Thanksgiving menu!”

The latter being 555’s signature creation, involving butter-poached lobster and shavings of black truffle. Thanksgiving at 555 is nothing if not a delicious splurge, with wine pairings are an option. “We haven’t set the exact menu and price yet, but last year it was \$75 per person. We have a kids’ menu, too.”
555 Congress St., Portland. 761-0555 fivefifty-five.com

The **Portland Harbor Hotel’s** new chef, Anthony St. Peter, is planning “quite the spread” for his first Thanksgiving at **Eve’s at the Garden**.

“We set up a huge buffet table with seatings from noon until six. Starters include a raw bar as well as tapas and spreads. We’ll have carving stations of slow-roasted turkey with sage-butter stuffing, prime rib, a baked ham with chutney, a pork loin roulade with

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HUNGRY EYE

prosciutto and smoked gouda, a shepherd's pie, pistachio-crusted salmon, and a winter vegetable cassoulet."

It's reservations only, adults \$49; kids \$19. 468 Fore St., Portland. 775-9090 evesatthegarden.com

EARLY & OFTEN

Some of us start craving turkey dinners the moment the air turns crisp and the leaves turn orange, so why restrict ourselves to a single Thursday in November? Two Portland dining landmarks help us jump the gun.

Thanksgiving is one of two days all year that **Becky's Diner** is not actually open, but the kitchen roasts a bird there every other day except Christmas. Imagine turkey dinner near the sparkle of the sea and the rough-and-tumble docks, with mashed potatoes, stuffing, squash, and cranberry sauce for \$11.95.

390 Commercial St., Portland. 773-7070 beckysdiner.com

On chilly autumn weekends around noontime, nearly every seat at the **Miss Portland Diner**—including the old wooden booths and counter stools in the original 1949 diner car—is taken. The mob loves the genuine treat of real roast turkey dinner here—sliced breast meat arranged over herby bread stuffing studded with bits of sausage. The potatoes are delicious—hand-mashed, with flecks of red skin and tender lumps remaining in the silky, flavorful mass. The gravy is rich, the cranberry sauce includes whole berries, and a side of fresh carrots is hand-cut and sweet. This feast is \$10.25. And it's available every day! Even with tax and a generous tip, your per-Thanksgiving moment is \$15 tops.

"We'll doll it up with peas and squash on Thanksgiving Day," says server Allyssa Vitalone, "with special pies and desserts. We're super-busy, and it's fun, with single people, lots of families, travelers."

Both diners serve wine and beer.

140 Marginal Way, Portland. 210-6673
missportlandiner.com

DESTINATIONS ELSEWHERE

"It's my single busiest day, people-wise, of the year," says executive chef Lynn Pressey at York Harbor's **Stage Neck Inn**.

And he should know. Pressey's worked at this exclusive resort since 1978, and served as chef for 30 years. "We have roast turkey, of course. But I also like to offer a stuffed fish, and there's roast pork loin, prime rib, a Ca-

jun oyster stuffing, and another stuffing with apples. We always have chowder, plus another soup."

This lavish buffet is \$37.95 per person. "We've figured out over the years that it's just a great way to bring your whole family together without all the work. It's a good mix, local Mainers and those from out of state. We have seatings about every half hour of up to 150 people."

The buffet is open from noon to five. 8 Stage Neck Rd., York. 363-3850 stageneckinn.com

"We'll serve 250," says Mitchell Kaldrovich, executive chef at **Sea Glass Restaurant** in Cape Elizabeth's Inn By The Sea. "Oh yes. Many of them are local people who come every year."

Kaldrovich's menu is ambitious, a multi-course *prix fixe* for \$62 per person. Starters include "lobster bisque or a vegan squash soup," and a choice of five salads.

"Our turkey is done a different way. I make a roulade of the boned dark meat and we roast it slowly. There's a filet mignon, grilled salmon, and a vegan quinoa dish." The desserts are house-made and very Maine—white chocolate cheesecake with blueberries, pumpkin pie, apple cake, and chocolate mousse cake.

The Inn is a destination for the long weekend. "Some packages include the Thanksgiving dinner. We also make it available as room service," if you'd like a private holiday. 40 Bowery Beach Rd., Cape Elizabeth. 799-3134 innbythesea.com

ROAD TRIP

"They come for the *pies*," says Dan Beck at **Moody's Diner**. "The dinner's just for their conscience." The grandson of founders Percy and Bertha Moody is kidding, even if the house-made pies are widely renowned.

"We do the whole nine yards for one price, probably \$16.95, from beverage to dessert. There'll be starters like soup or a fruit cup, the turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, local squash, boiled onions, cranberry sauce, and our homemade biscuits. It's more locals, something of a community service for people who need a place to go, but we get a lot of families."

And when you're a legendary roadside attraction with a reputation for hospitality, you can boast a bit. "I don't think we've ever been closed on Thanksgiving in 87 years." 1885 Rte. 1, Waldoboro. 832-7785 moodydiner.com ■



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