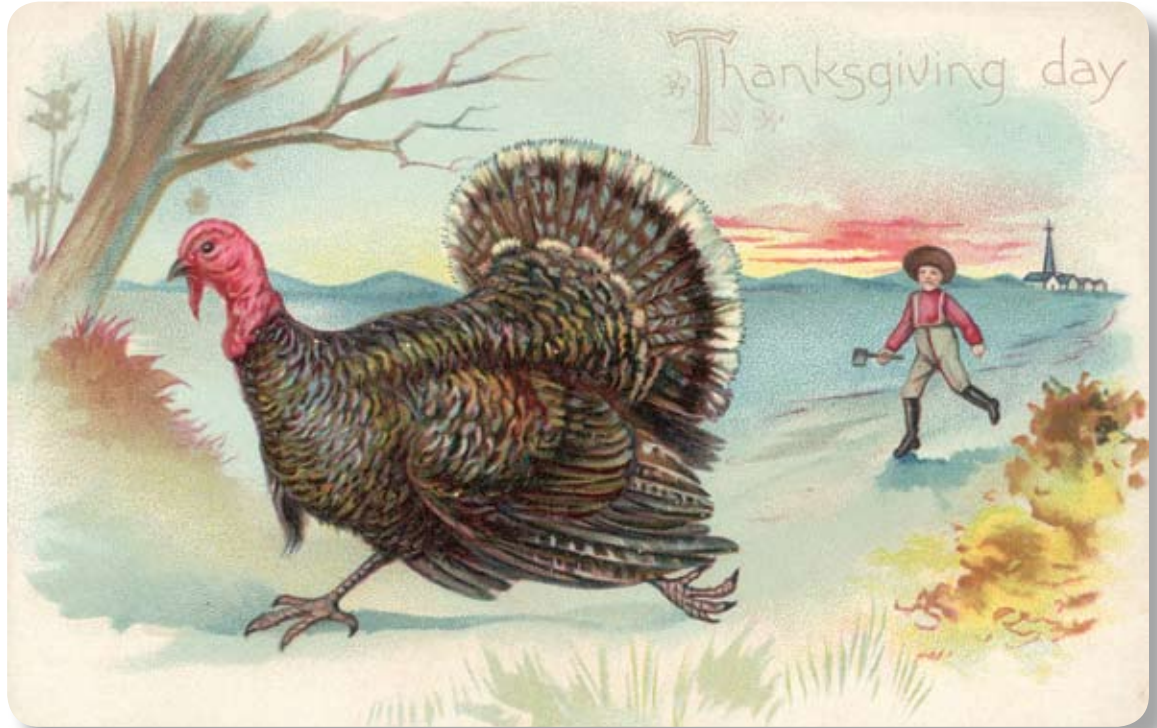


Heritage turkeys *the flavor of yesteryear*



Some things do change. You no longer have to chase your heritage turkey through the woods like on this vintage postcard.



America and the turkey have a long history together. The turkey has been a staple of the American diet since colonies were first established on our shores. Benjamin Franklin argued for the turkey as our national symbol instead of the eagle saying, “The turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America ...a bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards, who should presume to invade his farmyard with a red coat on.”

Few meals say American more than a turkey dinner with all the trimmings. Thanksgiving just wouldn't seem right without that beautiful, large bird roasted to a deep golden brown. Interestingly, the breed of turkey being cooked has been changing over the last couple of years as more people discover heritage turkeys—breeds that had fallen by the wayside as turkey farming became more commercial.

Heritage, or standard, turkeys are still a niche market, accounting for less than one percent of all turkeys sold. There are eight heritage breeds recognized by the American Poultry Association: the Black, Bronze, Narragansett, White-Holland, Slate, Bourbon Red, Beltsville Small White, and the Royal Palm. Others exist but they are not officially recognized.

What makes a turkey a heritage turkey? Believe it or not, there are very specific criteria that must be met:

1. **Natural mating**—No artificial insemination allowed. Turkeys must be “reproduced and genetically maintained” by natural means with a 70% to 80% fertility rate. This holds for both the parents and grandparents if the bird is going to be labeled heritage.
2. **A long, productive outdoor life span**—This is a fancy way of saying they must be productive (fertile) for five to seven years for hens and three to five years for toms and that they can survive being outdoors on their own.
3. **Slow growth rate**—Today’s heritage turkey takes about 28 weeks to achieve a marketable weight (nonheritage birds take only about 18 weeks). This slow growth allows for a strong skeletal structure and organ function.

JenEhr Family Farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, is one of a growing number of farms that have made the commitment to growing heritage turkeys. Owners Kay Jenson and Paul Ehrhardt farm 109 acres. They raise turkeys and chickens, and grow



JenEhr’s turkeys chatter happily in their pasture. Grass-fed poultry has a better balance of health-promoting essential fatty acids (omega-3, and omega-6). They also have fewer calories and more vitamin A, vitamin E, and beta-carotene than caged birds.



Kay Jenson and Paul Ehrhardt of JenEhr Family Farm.

50 different vegetables in 100 different varieties. They operate a 220-member CSA, work farmers’ markets in Madison and West Allis, and service restaurants and co-ops throughout southern Wisconsin. The JenEhr Family Farm philosophy can be explained in three words: sustainable, local, and organic. That philosophy carries over in the quality of everything JenEhr produces.

“Kay and I have always been involved in agriculture, and we wanted to do something on a family-sized scale that our kids could be involved in where they would be safe wherever they went on the farm,” explained Paul. “We’ve been here about 10 years now. We’ve been farming organically since we started with the exception of our poultry. That’s only because we haven’t been able to source organic corn and soybeans locally.”

That will change in 2008. Kay Jenson explained, “We have just found a local organic feed source, so next year we can be certified organic on our birds.”

“The chickens and turkeys are all raised on organic pasture,” said Paul. “We start the

What's on your table?

A HERITAGE TURKEY QUIZ

1



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2



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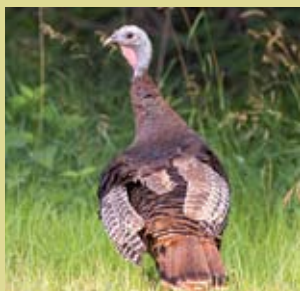
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Bourbon Red, Bronze, Narragansett turkey vulture (let's hope this isn't on your plate!), wild turkey

turkeys in a brooder house because small turkeys are very delicate. We keep them inside the first five weeks. We have to wait until they have enough feathers and are big enough that the hawks and great horned owls in the area will leave them alone.”

The young turkeys are put in canvas-covered pens on the pasture. Pens are moved twice a day so that they have a constant fresh source of the clover and insects they prefer to eat. At eight to nine weeks the pens are opened and the turkeys are free to roam. Remarkably, they seldom venture more than 50 feet away from the pens, as the turkeys consider the pens their place of safety.

JenEhr raises American Bronze turkeys, the breed that comprised about 80% of the turkeys sold before the appearance, in the 1950s, of the Broad-breasted Whites we know today. “We just like the Bronze. They’re very sociable and really chatter; they’re just a fun bird,” explained Kay. “If you consider the taste of a Broad-breasted White as skim milk with water added and wild turkeys as whole milk with chocolate added, the American Bronze is about half way between. It’s an earthier, richer flavor. There’s something about the texture and the quality of the bird. I think it’s a combination of the breed and the pasture.”

Kay also explained that cooking an American Bronze is slightly different in that they take less time to cook and they tend to retain more moisture, even as leftovers. “Cook them in the same fashion that you would cook a Broad-breasted White but the American Bronze is going to take about 30% less time. If the cookbook says 12 to 15 minutes per pound for a white breasted, you’re going to be at only 8 to 10 minutes. We recommend that you keep the dressing separate, start breast side down and about half way through the cooking time flip it breast side up.”

JenEhr turkeys come in either half or whole birds and are \$3.50 a pound. The half turkeys run 12 to 15 pounds, small turkeys run 15 to 18 pounds, and the large birds are 18 pounds and over. The best way to order is to use an order form on their website at www.wisconsingrown.com. There is a \$15 deposit required when you mail back the form. Supplies are limited as JenEhr only raises just under 200 turkeys a year. Pickup is on November 17 at the Dane County Farmers Market at Monona Terrace from 7 A.M. to noon, the West Allis Farmers Market from 1 to 5 P.M., or at the farm from 2 to 5 P.M.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are just around the corner. This year create an old fashioned holiday by serving a heritage turkey with the flavor of yesteryear. In a world where people are increasingly curious about where their food comes from JenEhr Family Farm has the answer; from their family to yours.

• IF YOU GO •

JenEhr Family Farm
 6837 Elder Lane
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www.wisconsingrown.com

For more information on heritage turkeys:
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