

A Lucky Break!

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While we often associate Thanksgiving with watching holiday parades, gathering with loved ones and eating a sumptuous meal, there's a fun Turkey Day tradition that occurs long after the leftovers have been stowed away and some of the guests may have already headed home: breaking the wishbone.

It may be tempting to include this activity in the schedule for that special day; however, a freshly removed bone, whether taken from a raw or cooked turkey, will not crack properly. To ensure a nice, clean break, it's advised to set aside the wishbone for a few days, since it will be ready to use as soon as it's completely dry and brittle. Although some may suggest methods to hurry the drying process along, culinary experts recommend that it's best to let nature take its due course. That's why a number of families opt to save the previous year's bone for the next annual Thanksgiving get-together or to make it part of their seasonal celebration in December.

Perhaps you may have questioned how we ended up with such an unusual holiday ritual. The origins of this tradition date back to 322 B.C., when it is credited to the Etruscans, an ancient Italian civilization. Since the people of that culture considered birds to be future-predicting oracles, it became the practice to remove the wishbone of a chicken while preparing it to be cooked and to set out the bone in the sun to dry. As passersby came across it while trekking around town, they would hold it in their hands and rub it while making wishes. When the Romans came into contact with the Etruscans, they adopted this custom, which they are believed to have taken a step further. Story has it that so many people wanted to have the opportunity to touch a wishbone and express their fondest desires, that there simply weren't enough bones to meet the demand. Since that was the case, the familiar tradition, in which two contenders vie



for the larger portion of the broken bone, emerged. From there, the ritual passed from the Romans to the English, and the colonists brought it with them when they came to Plymouth Rock. Since wild turkeys were so abundant in North America, the early settlers soon swapped chicken bones for those obtained from the larger birds.

Interestingly, although this tradition has endured for centuries, the word "wishbone" is a comparatively new linguistic development. Historians note that the term, coined in America during the 1850s, was named for the practice of making a wish on a bone. It's also fitting that this fused bone which helps to strengthen a bird's skeleton for flight has come to be associated with the Thanksgiving meal, since its name, *furcula*, is Latin for "little fork."

Want to increase your odds of success at the wishbone game this year? If you are "in it to win it," ModernFarmer.com offers the following tips. Before the game commences, thoroughly dry your hands, possibly wiping them on a dishtowel. Consider coating your hands in rosin, a solid form of resin, since it'll help give you a more powerful grip. Pay attention to your hand placement: unless your family rules dictate otherwise, try grasping the wishbone between your thumb and forefinger, while also remaining as close to the center point as possible. Give yourself better leverage by holding your portion of the bone in your dominant hand, then pressing back against the counter or other nearby surface with your other hand. Remember that, while some of these contests end with a quick snap, breaking this bone may take more than just a sudden pull; be prepared to maintain your best efforts for several seconds or, with a skilled opponent, even longer than a minute. To gain the greatest upper hand, however, it's hinted that you might coast into the kitchen while the wishbone is still drying out to evaluate which side appears stronger. If you then make sure that you get that section, winning's a snap, no bones about it!

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