



# Turkey y Mole

SMOKY  | RICH  | AROMATIC  | EARTHY 

*Give your turkey a real glow-up with mole  
con hondura*

# *Vibes - Turkey Part 1*

## *Why Turkey*

Turkey didn't become the Thanksgiving bird because of symbolism — it was because of practicality. Turkeys were native, big enough to feed a whole family, and didn't produce milk or eggs, so eating one didn't cost you future resources. By the 1800s, writer Sarah Josepha Hale helped cement turkey as the holiday centerpiece. What started as a practical choice eventually turned into tradition.

## *What the Name Means*

Long before it hit the holiday table, turkey was part of Indigenous foodways — roasted and smoked because it was abundant and loved wood fire. Black pitmasters in the South later elevated slow smoking into an art, giving turkey a new identity. Smoke gives this mild bird what it needs most: moisture, aroma, and depth.

# Turkey Part 2

## Why It Matters

Turkey has a reputation for being dry, bland, and stressful — the culinary equivalent of a group project where one person never does their part. Smoking flips that script. Slow heat and wood give turkey structure, juiciness, and aroma it lacks on its own. It becomes the rare holiday dish that's both traditional and actually delicious. The bird suddenly has presence — not just a job to do, but a personality.

## Modern Takes

Smoked turkey isn't tied to one region anymore. Texas pits do it with post oak, Puerto Rican cooks pair it with adobo and sofrito, and home cooks hack it with ovens, grills, pellets, or even stovetop smokers. Some folks glaze it with guava, brush it with miso, or baste with chile butter. Wherever people want deep flavor without holiday stress, smoked turkey fits right in.

# Vibes - Mole

## *Where It Comes From*

*Mole* is one of Mexico's deepest food traditions — shaped by Indigenous techniques and centuries of cultural blending<sup>12</sup>. Nahua, Mixtec, and Zapotec cooks were grinding chiles, seeds, and spices long before colonization. Later African, Spanish, and Arab influences added nuts, spices, and cacao. Instead of one recipe, mole became a whole family — negro, poblano, coloradito — each with its own story.

## *What Makes a Mole a Mole*

Mole isn't "chocolate sauce." It's a slow-built mix of roasted chiles, nuts, seeds, spices, and aromatics, simmered until everything becomes one deep, unified flavor<sup>3</sup>. If chocolate appears, it's there for bitterness and body, not sweetness. A good mole feels like gravity — ingredients pulled toward one center, tasting bigger than the sum of what went in.

# Mole Part 2

## Why It Matters

Mole is celebration food — a sauce made for moments that deserve time and attention. It's layered, slow, and intentional, carrying generations of technique in every step. Pairing it with turkey gives the bird a depth it doesn't have on its own, turning a simple roast into a dish with history, warmth, and real weight.

## Modern Takes

Today mole shows up everywhere: spooned over roasted veggies, folded into ramen, brushed onto grilled chicken, or blended with citrus and herbs. Chefs remix it with plantains, tahini, charred tomatoes, or toasted sesame. What stays constant is the balance — chiles, seeds, aromatics, and that slow pull toward a deep, unified flavor.

# Grandpa Bill's Lab Notes

Grandpa Bill didn't believe in recipes — he believed in ratios, rhythm, and sharing what works. This turkey & mole dish follows that same spirit. You're not chasing exactness; you're chasing balance: texture, heat, aroma, and what the moment calls for. The lab notes are here so you can riff, adjust, and pass it on your own way.

This turkey and mole are all about depth — slow smoke, warm spice, and that long-simmered flavor that unfolds in layers. The idea came from wanting the smoke of the turkey to meet the richness of a real mole, where the chiles, seeds, and cacao make the bird taste bigger than it looks. It's a pairing built on contrast and harmony at the same time.

Grandpa Bill would tell you to trust your senses more than your timer — when the kitchen smells right and the sound of the sizzle changes, you're close.

# Lab Notes - Mole

## *On bitter at first taste*

Real mole starts sharp — bitter chocolate, toasted chiles, nuts, seeds — all their edges are exposed until everything simmers, blends, and chills. If yours tasted bitter before seasoning - that is totally fine.

## *On seasoning at the end*

Salt and sugar unlock the body of the sauce. Add too early and you'll misjudge the final balance.

## *On mole's love of nap time*

The sauce is better the next day. The flavors mellow, the oils settle, the aromatics marry. Make it early if you can — it rewards patience.

# Lab Notes - Mole Brine

## *On the long soak*

A turkey brines for 12–24 hours because its muscle fibers are big and slow to hydrate. Salt loosens the protein structure so water, aromatics, and flavor actually move inside the meat — not just sit on the skin. This is how you get a turkey that tastes seasoned all the way to the bone.

## *On full submersion*

A half-submerged turkey is a half-brined turkey. If your vessel isn't large enough, flip the bird every 6–8 hours. Consistency matters way more than speed.

# Lab Notes - Mole Brine Pt 2

## *On aromatics*

Bay, rosemary, sage, citrus, onions, garlic — they don't just perfume the water. Their oils help soften any “gamey” notes and add round, herbal depth that shows up subtly in each bite. You're layering flavor from the inside out.

## *On mole in the brine?!*

Yes — chocolate + chiles aren't dessert, they're chemistry. The cocoa's bitterness enhances savoriness (same logic as coffee in chili), while the chile's fruity heat adds dimension to the turkey. The brine isn't supposed to taste like mole... it's supposed to taste richer and deeper because of mole.

# Lab Notes - Turkey

## On smokers

This is the method that gets you the Lion-style “holy shit” turkey.

## On smoker temp

260–285°F | This gives you color, smoke penetration, and moisture control.

## On positioning

Breast-down = self-basting. Gravity feeds fat and moisture into the leanest meat.

## On pull temps

Breast: 160–165°F | Thigh/leg: 170–175°F

## On rest

30–60 minutes tented or in a cooler. This is where the magic happens.

# Notes - Turkey Part 2

## On charcoal grills

Most backyard grills aren't big enough to truly do "half-direct, half-indirect" with a full bird. So here are the actual realistic options:

## On creating a center barrier

Place a pizza stone, a brick, or a cast-iron pan in the middle of the lower grate. This protects the turkey from burning. Add coals in a ring or horseshoe around the barrier. No coals under the bird. Wood chunks go on top of the ring for smoke.

## On coals and vents

Plan to add hot coals from a chimney every 45-60 minutes. This is normal — not a failure. Top vent mostly open. Bottom vent  $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$  open. Rotate the lid to even out hotspots

## On struggles maintaining temp

Hit it with the hybrid method — start on the grill for smoke + color, finish in the oven. (It's not cheating)

# Notes - Turkey Part 3

## On gas grills

Turn one burner to medium, leave the others off. Turkey goes over the cool zone. Foil packet of wood chips above the lit burner.

Aim for 275–300°F

## On ovens

Roast at 325°F. Add a pan of hot water for humidity. Mole glaze goes on in the final 30 minutes. Simple, reliable, delicious.

## On basting

Don't baste early: Opening the lid in hour one just dumps heat. Let the skin set first.

Baste in the last 45–60 minutes: This is when the mole or butter glaze sticks and caramelizes.

Thin the mole: Loosen it with warm stock or melted butter so it brushes on clean and doesn't scorch.

Basting adds flavor, not moisture: The brine keeps it juicy. The baste makes it beautiful.

# Ingredients - Mole Sauce

- 3–4 ancho chiles
- 2 guajillo chiles
- 1–2 pasilla chiles (optional but fire)
- 1 small onion, rough chopped
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 roma tomato or ½ cup tomato puree
- ¼ cup peanuts, almonds, or pecans
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 1 small corn tortilla or 1 slice bread (for body)
- 1 tbsp cocoa powder or 1–2 squares Mexican chocolate
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp clove
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp oregano
- Salt + sugar to taste (season at the end)
- 2–3 cups chicken stock
- Splash of oil for sautéing

# Ingredients - Turkey & Brine

## For the brine

- 1–1.5 gallons water
- 1 cup kosher salt
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder or 1–2 squares Mexican chocolate
- 2 dried ancho chiles
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 onion, quartered
- 1 head garlic, halved
- 2–3 sprigs rosemary
- 2–3 sprigs sage
- 1 orange, sliced
- 1 tbsp black peppercorns
- ½–1 tsp liquid smoke (only if no smoker)

## For the turkey

- 1 whole turkey (12–15 lb is the sweet spot)
- ¼ cup oil or melted butter (for skin)
- 2 tbsp salt (dry rub)
- 1–2 tbsp black pepper or your spice blend
- Optional: a few spoonfuls mole for glazing during cooking

# Cooking Instructions

## *Toast the chiles*

Remove stems and most seeds. Heat a dry pan. Toast ancho, guajillo, pasilla until fragrant (10–15 sec each side). Don't burn them — burnt mole tastes like punishment.

## *Soften the chiles*

Drop toasted chiles into hot water or stock. Let them soak 15–20 min until floppy.

## *Build the flavor base*

In a pan with a little oil - sauté onion + garlic until softened. Add nuts, seeds, and the tortilla/bread. Toast everything lightly — this is your body.

# Instructions - Part 2

## Blend

Into a blender add - Rehydrated chiles, the sautéed mixture, tomato/purée, cocoa or Mexican chocolate, 1–2 cups stock. Blend smooth. Adjust with more stock if too thick.

## Simmer

Pour the blended mole into a pot. Simmer 30–45 minutes, stirring so it doesn't scorch.

## Season AT THE END

Taste and add: Salt (opens the chile flavor), Sugar (balances bitterness), Small splash vinegar or citrus if needed. If it suddenly tastes “right,” you nailed it.

## Chill overnight if you can

It gets better the next day — deeper, rounder, smoother.

# Cooking Instructions - Turkey

## Brine the Turkey

Mix your mole brine over heat (salt, sugar, aromatics, cocoa, chiles). After the brine cools completely, submerge turkey 12–24 hours. If it won't fully submerge, flip every 6–8 hours.

## Prep the Turkey

Let the turkey air-dry if possible (fan helps). Make a wet rub with oil or melted butter and your seasoning (I used a mix of Savory & Mild and Sweet & Spicy). Have a thinned mole glaze ready for later.

Decide the heat source

Smoker: directly on the grate (no bag).

Oven, charcoal grill, gas grill: turkey bag inside a roasting tin. (Better moisture, more stable temps, fewer surprises.)

# Turkey Part 2

## Prep Your Heat Source

Smoker: Target 260–285°F. Build a stable coal bed + fruitwood/pecan chunks. Let the temp settle for at least 10–15 minutes before adding the turkey.

Charcoal Grill: Put a pizza stone / cast iron / brick in the center of the lower grate. Build a ring or horseshoe of coals around it. Add new hot coals every 45–60 minutes. Hold 275–300°F.

Gas Grill: One burner on, others off » turkey over the cool zone. Wood-chip packet over the lit burner. Hold 275–300°F.

Oven: Preheat to 325°F. Optional pan of water below for extra humidity. Turkey stays in the bag + roasting tin for the full cook.

# Turkey Part 3

## Cook the Turkey

Put the turkey into your prepared setup and do not open anything for the first hour.

Target cooking temps: Smoker: 260–285°F | Charcoal grill: 275–300°F | Gas grill: 275–300°F | Oven: 325°F

Internal temperature targets: Breast: 160–165°F | Thigh/leg: 170–175°F

## Basting

Smoker birds only: Start basting once the turkey passes 130–140°F internal. Thin mole with warm stock/butter and apply light coats in the last 45–60 minutes.

Bagged birds: Do not baste in the bag. Baste after cooking, when the turkey comes out of the bag, then crisp in oven/grill 10–15 minutes if you want color.

## Rest

Rest turkey 30–60 minutes before carving. Cooler rest gives you the most even carryover cooking and juiciest slices.

# Shopping List

## Produce

- 1 whole turkey
- 1–2 onions
- 1 head garlic (plus extra cloves if you're roasting)
- 1 orange
- 1 roma tomato (or ½ cup tomato puree)
- Fresh sage
- Fresh rosemary

## Dried Chiles

- Ancho chiles
- Guajillo chiles
- Pasilla chiles (optional)

## Nuts & Seeds

- Peanuts or almonds or pecans
- Sesame seeds

# Shopping List - Part 2

## Dry Goods

- Corn tortilla OR slice of bread
- Cocoa powder or Mexican chocolate
- Kosher salt
- Sugar
- Black peppercorns
- Cumin, cinnamon, clove, oregano
- Oil (olive or neutral)

## Pantry

- Chicken stock (you'll need several cups)
- Liquid smoke (optional, if oven/grill only)

## Smoking / Grill

- Pecan, apple, cherry, or fruitwood chunks
- Charcoal (lump or briquettes)