

Don't deep-fry yourself or your home with a turkey fryer

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Aficionados agree that deep-frying a turkey is the best way to prepare the most flavorful and moist version of the traditional centerpiece of the Thanksgiving meal. Serafino Alfe was deep-frying turkeys for an annual fundraiser dinner recently and ended up at the Loyola Burn unit with third-degree burns -- the worst kind -- on his leg.

"I tripped and fell right into the deep fryer," the Mount Prospect resident said. "Thirty quarts of hot [oil](#) poured over my leg and I basically fried myself."

In the United States, more than 141 serious fires and hot-oil burns have been reported from the use of turkey fryers over the last decade, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Alfe said he has used a deep fryer for many years and is always careful. "We put the deep fryers on cardboard and I caught my shoe on the edge and just lost my balance," said Alfe, who will undergo surgery on his injured leg on the day before Thanksgiving. "We were using the older fryers that do not have a secure lid and the gallons of hot oil just splattered out everywhere."

Taking care to not become a victim of a fire and serious burns applies equally inside the home on [Thanksgiving](#) Day, the leading day for cooking fires, with three times as many as on an average day, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

“Cooking remains a major mechanism of injuries for adults, and for children who are underfoot,” said Richard L. Gamelli, MD, director, Burn & Shock Trauma Institute of Loyola University Health System and provost and senior VP of the Health Sciences Division of Loyola University Chicago. Loyola’s Burn Center is one of the busiest in the Midwest, treating nearly 600 patients annually in the hospital and another 3,500 patients each year in its clinic. More than 40 percent of the burn cases are children.

“If a turkey fryer is used the way it’s supposed to be used by people who are not impaired by alcohol or drugs, I think they’re fine,” said Dr. Thomas Esposito, chief of the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care and Burns in the Department of Surgery, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. “Injuries from turkey fryers are rare, but when they happen to you or a family member, that doesn’t matter – they are very devastating.”

If you’re planning to use a turkey fryer, Esposito said safety tips to heed include:

- Look for the newer fryers with sealed lids to prevent oil spills
- Keep the fryer in full view while the burner is on
- Keep children and pets away from the cooking area
- Place the fryer in an open area away from all walls, fences or other structures
- Never use the fryer in, on or under a garage, breezeway, carport, porch, deck or any other structure that can catch fire
- Slowly raise and lower the turkey to reduce hot-oil splatter and to avoid burns
- Never cook in short sleeves, shorts or bare feet. Cover all bare skin when dunking or removing bird
- Protect your eyes with goggles or glasses
- Immediately turn off the fryer if the oil begins to smoke

- Make sure the turkey is completely thawed and be careful with marinades. Oil and water don't mix and water can cause oil to spill over, creating a fire or even an explosion
- Don't overfill the fryer with oil. Turkey fryers can ignite in seconds after oil hits the burner
- Keep a fire extinguisher appropriate for oil fires close at hand and be familiar with how to operate it
- Do not use a hose in an attempt to douse a turkey fryer fire
- If you do burn yourself, or someone else is burned, seek immediate medical attention

Also keep in mind that each year \$15 million in property damage is caused by deep fryer fires in the United States.

“It doesn't matter if it is a turkey fryer or a conventional oven, you should always take great care when using appliances, vehicles and any other device that has the potential to cause great harm to yourself and others if used in a careless, irresponsible manner,” Esposito said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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