



# The Holiday Prep Playbook

For Restaurant Owners and Operators

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# Introduction

Thinking about holiday ordering can be difficult during the summer rush. As patio season is in full swing and evening happy hours run long, it's easy to forget that Fall and Winter holiday prep needs to begin long before the first leaf falls.

That's why we've created this guide with advice and insights on preparing for the Fall and Winter holidays. Inside you'll find advice for ordering key supplies, menuing to reduce labor needs, and hitting holiday trends. Plus, we round out our guide with suggested catering menus.

The Foodbuy Culinary Solutions Team works with Members across industries and regions to optimize menus, procurement, and operations. Because of this, we know what operations need to focus on for success in every season. Reach out to us to learn more at



**Chef Phillip Ma**

Foodbuy Culinary  
Solutions Team



# When to Buy What

Keep it simple and plan ahead. If you're considering seasonal specials or rotating your menu to feature fall and winter ingredients, start planning as early as possible.

Whether you're adding seasonal twists to existing favorites or introducing entirely new menu items, early planning allows you to source products more effectively, train staff, and market your offerings before the holiday rush.

Buy with the seasons and stay informed on supply chain conditions. Work closely with your distributor representatives and Foodbuy partners, as they have the best insight into seasonal availability, pricing, and potential supply challenges. .

## Prioritize High-Demand Items

**1.** Turkey, ham, premium beef

**2.** Specialty desserts and apps

**3.** Seasonal flavoring ingredients

**4.** Catering essentials



# Tips for Low-Labor Holidays

Labor concerns are still plaguing the restaurant industry. Especially when it comes to high-traffic holiday seasons. Consider these three strategies to help you get all hands on deck to deck the halls.

## Frozen-to-Cook Items

Time and effort is saved when your dishes are able to go straight from the freezer to the oven. Opting for frozen items as your side dishes can save up labor for center-of-the-plate items. Additionally, frozen bases can be elevated with garnishes, sauces, and plating.

## Reducing Made-to-Order Meals

When labor is short, advanced preparation is key. While made-to-order items are an ideal offer for higher-end eateries in regular times, during holiday rushes, you may need to pare back. Consider more prepped items for your holiday menus and specials.

## Training Staff in Advance

The earlier you have your holiday specials and catering meals planned, the earlier you can begin training your staff. When everyone is prepared and informed in advance, labor shortages are less likely to impact operations.



# 2026 Holiday Trends

What's getting diners in the doors this year? Our team has tracked culinary trends every month of 2026. We predict that these 5 trends will carry through into the holiday season.

## Elevated Comfort



- ✓ Classic holiday flavors with upgrades
- ✓ Familiar enough to sell, different enough to stand out
- ✓ Examples: Short rib pot pie, truffle mashed potatoes, miso-glazed turkey

## Social and Shareable



- ✓ Group-friendly, low-commitment dining is popular now
- ✓ Works extremely well for hotel socials, bars, and casual dining
- ✓ Examples: boards, platters, grazing tables, "build-your-own" bars

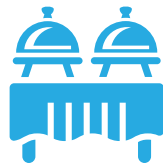


## Global Influence

- ✓ Traditional holiday meals with international flavors
- ✓ Mediterranean, Latin American, and Asian flavors are showing up in holiday menus
- ✓ Examples: Harissa roasted vegetables, gochujang-glazed ham

# 2026 Holiday Trends

## Convenience Corner



- ✓ Heat-and-serve meals, take-home kits, and pre-order bundles
- ✓ A great draw for office parties and family gatherings
- ✓ Major revenue unlock

## Balancing Wellness + Indulgence



- ✓ Guests are splitting behavior between **Indulgent**: rich, nostalgic dishes and **Balanced**: lighter, plant-forward, or “clean” options
- ✓ Smart operators offer both on the same menu

# Holiday Bundles

The holiday season is the ideal time to focus on pre-orders, catering, and bundled meal offerings. Family meals, party platters, and office catering packages are proven drivers of both sales volume and profitability, often outperforming traditional à la carte offerings when promoted effectively.



## Classic Thanksgiving Feast

- Herb-roasted turkey
- Traditional stuffing
- Mashed potatoes and gravy
- Green bean casserole
- Roasted seasonal vegetables
- Cranberry sauce
- dinner rolls with butter
- Pumpkin pie OR apple pie



## Hanukkah Celebration Bundle

- Slow-braised brisket
- Potato latkes with sour cream & applesauce
- Roasted seasonal vegetables
- Noodle kugel
- Challah rolls
- Mixed green salad
- Assorted rugelach and sufganiyot

# Holiday Bundles



## Christmas Holiday Dinner Package

- Honey-glazed ham OR herb-crusted prime rib
- Garlic mashed potatoes
- Roasted Brussels sprouts
- Glazed carrots
- Macaroni & cheese
- Dinner rolls
- Holiday cookies
- Pecan pie OR cheesecake



## Kwanzaa Family Feast

- Jerk chicken OR braised beef
- Jollof rice
- Collard greens
- Candied sweet potatoes
- Black-eyed pea salad
- Cornbread
- Sweet potato pie

# Holiday Bundles



## New Year's Celebration Package

- Charcuterie and cheese board
- Shrimp cocktail
- Spinach & artichoke dip with chips
- Mini meatballs
- Assorted sliders
- Vegetable crudités with dip
- Bite-sized desserts
- Sparkling cider OR mocktail kit

# Contact Us



Website

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