

There's a reason turkeys are depicted with plump bodies and impressive appetites. These amazing birds are **omnivores**, meaning they consume a wide variety of plant and animal matter. Did you know there are actually two extant species of wild turkey? The wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) lives in North America. The ocellated turkey (*Meleagris ocellata*) lives in Central America. Both share a love for a diverse menu. It can include over 200 different foods depending on the season and location.

What Does Turkey Eat for Food?



Turkeys are amazing birds that can live in many different places across North America. Because they live in so many different places, their food changes with the seasons. However, some favorite foods always stay on their menu. Knowing what turkeys like to eat can be very helpful, especially for turkey hunters. So, what do these birds enjoy eating the most?

Let's look at four of their favorite foods:

1. Bugs and Insects

Turkeys love to eat bugs. They will eat insects whenever they find them. They look for them most in late spring and summer. Female turkeys, called hens, need the protein from grasshoppers, beetles, and other bugs to lay eggs. When baby turkeys, called poults, hatch, they eat mostly insects for the first few weeks of their lives.

Turkeys often live in places where there are lots of bugs. These places include hayfields, food plots, and other open areas with some cover nearby to hide from predators.

But turkeys don't just eat bugs in the spring. They will chase insects any time the weather is nice. During early spring, hunters can often find turkeys in areas with early greenery. Places like sunny creek bottoms and south-facing slopes warm up and get green first. These areas also have the earliest insect activity, and you can bet turkeys will be there looking for a meal.

2. Tender Greens

Turkeys also love to eat green plants. In the spring, hens will lead their poults into green fields to find insects and also to eat the greens themselves. They like to eat legumes like clover and alfalfa. This makes fields and food plots very attractive to them because they can find both bugs and greens in these places.

Turkeys also enjoy eating the shoots of newly sprouted cereal grains like wheat and oats. In the wild, they pick at many of the same plants that deer like to eat. So, in early spring, hunters can find turkeys in areas that are greening up with tender shoots. This includes agricultural fields, food plots, or wild plants.

3. Hard and Soft Mast

Fall can be a frustrating time for turkey hunters. The reason? These birds become masters of disguise. They roam in search of a different kind of bounty: nuts and berries, also known as mast. Acorns, especially white oak acorns, are a top fall favorite, but beech nuts, which fall in early to mid-October, are also enjoyed. But the love of mast isn't confined to autumn. In the spring and summer, they indulge in blackberries, mulberries, and other soft mast options.

Interestingly, in some regions, turkeys have developed unique preferences. Nebraska Sandhills turkeys enjoy cedar berries in spring. South Texas birds find a spicy treat in tiny

chiltepin peppers.

4. Seeds and Grain

In farm country, turkeys form large winter flocks and feed on waste grain from cut corn and sorghum fields. They also scratch for seeds in haybales and grain left in cow pies. Wild turkeys cause an estimated \$50 million in crop damage annually in the United States.

Land managers outside of farm areas can contribute to the well-being of these magnificent birds by planting food plots. Corn, soybeans, sorghum, milo, sunflowers, and chufa are all great for a winter turkey's pantry. They keep the turkeys fed and happy in the cold months.

FAQs

1. What do wild turkeys eat?

Wild turkeys eat a variety of foods. They eat insects, like crickets and beetles, and tender greens, like clover and alfalfa. They also eat nuts, such as acorns, berries, and seeds. They also feed on grains like corn and soybeans, especially in farm areas.

2. Do turkeys eat bugs?

Yes, turkeys eat bugs. They especially love insects in late spring and summer because they need the protein for egg production. Young turkeys (poults), mostly eat insects in their first few weeks of life.

3. Can turkeys eat human food?

Turkeys can eat some human foods like fruits, vegetables, and grains. However, they should not eat processed foods, salty snacks, or anything with chemicals, as these can be harmful to them.

4. How much do turkeys eat in a day?

Adult hens eat around 1/3 pound while toms eat 1/2 to 1 pound daily. Their diet is mostly plants (90%) with some insects and other small critters (10%).

Last Words

Knowing what does turkey eat for food and how they feed can help you find and tag the birds. It will greatly boost your chances of success. So next time you're in the field, remember these insights. They will help you find turkeys based on their diets.