

Ladies Have You Heard?

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Lancaster Home Economist



HOW HOT IS HOT? HOW COLD IS COLD?

Bacteria and germs which cause food-borne illness can be very deceiving. They are so small you cannot see them without

the use of a high-powered microscope. You cannot always smell or taste them, either. In fact, there is no sure way of knowing these bacteria and germs are present.

That is one reason why they are so dangerous.

The effects of food-borne illness are similar to those of the flu - headache, fever, stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. Remember the last you were sick for a day or so? You may not have had the flu - it could have been food poisoning.

Careful handling of food can help you limit the growth of bacteria which can cause food-borne illness. Otherwise, you could be headed for big trouble. The "Trouble Zone" for food safety ranges from 40 degrees to 140 degrees F. Germs and bacteria multiply rapidly in this temperature range, making your food unsafe to eat.

Pay close attention to two important stages of safe food handling: storage and cooking. Perishable items should be kept below 40 degrees F. during storage and above 140 degrees during the cooking process - to detour the "Trouble Zone."

It sounds easy enough. But, what is the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer? Are they cold and safe places to store your perishable items? Test them and see.

It makes no difference whether you choose to dry, broil, or bake those delicious steaks. The important thing to remember is to avoid the "Trouble Zone." Be sure to cook your meat products to an internal temperature of at least 140 degrees F.

That does not sound difficult. After all, when you bake at 350 degrees F., doesn't the meat reach 350 degrees? No! It's impossible to tell what the internal temperature of meat and poultry is just by looking, touching, or tasting. The only way to find out the accurate temperature is to insert a meat thermometer into the center of the meat and take a reading. At 140 degrees - generally considered as rare - meat should be free of germs and bacteria. If you like your meat medium to well done, cook it to an internal temperature of 160-180 degrees F.

If you don't own a couple of thermometers, they should be the most important item on your shopping list. And don't just buy them - use them, frequently.

Otherwise, you could be headed for trouble.

Remember: Avoid the "Trouble Zone"; between 40 and 140 degrees F. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

IT'S ZUCCHINI SEASON!

Are you stumped about what to do with the zucchini that is showing up everywhere at this time of year? Fresh zucchini are delicious as wedges in a fresh garden salad or as spears on a fresh vegetable tray. They can also be stir-fried, stuffed, baked, broiled, or steamed.

Canning is another alternative if you have too many to use at once. The Hot Pack method is recommended. Wash them and trim the ends, but don't pare. Cut into pieces of a uniform size - 1/2 inch slices or larger pieces such as quarters. Heat the pieces in a blancher submerged in boiling water for two to three minutes. Pack the hot zucchini in jars, adding one teaspoon of salt per quart. Add boiling water, leaving one inch head space. Remove the air bubbles with a thin spatula, and readjust the head space. Wipe the top edge of the jar with a wet paper towel, add the lids and tighten the screw bands. Place the jars in a pressure canner so they don't touch the sides of the canner or each other. Process at 10 pounds of pressure, 40 minutes for quarts; 30 minutes for pints. Always cool the canner for 40-45 minutes before opening the vent. Wait two more minutes, then remove the lid.

Zucchini is available nearly year-round, but its most plentiful and usually cheaper during the summer and fall months. Keep it refrigerated and always try to use within several days. Zucchini is a great source of vitamin A, that is, unless you peel it. Most of the vitamin A is stored in the skin, so be sure to eat it, too. For those of you who are calorie counters - you're in luck! One cup of sliced zucchini has only 22 calories.

If you are looking for recipe ideas to use now, call or write the Lancaster County Extension office at 394-6851. We have put together a recipe sheet with nine different tast-tempters on it. We'll gladly send you a copy free of charge.

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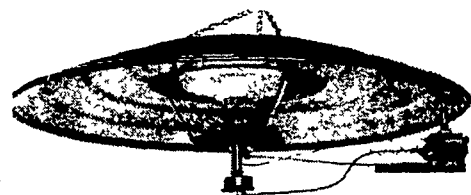
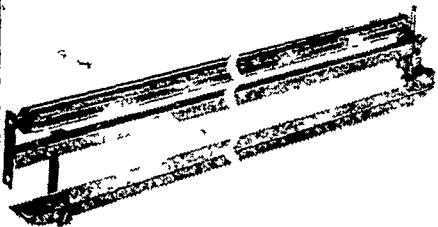
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