



## Brush up on food coverings

Many people have questions about covering food in a microwave; so here's the low-down on microwave cover ups.

Covering food when you cook it in a microwave will do several things, depending on the type of covering you choose. All coverings hold heat around the food so it cooks a little more evenly. Some coverings also trap steam around the food to steam the food as it cooks. And some covers absorb moisture or grease.

Here is a list of the various coverings you might use in your microwave, and an explanation of what they do. Choose a covering for your food to fit the type of food you are cooking, and how you want it to cook.

**Casserole lid:** A tightly fitting lid will keep the heat and moisture (steam) around your food so it heats quickly and remains very moist and damp. Use it for steaming vegetables, cooking pot roasts, stews, rice, pasta, and casseroles where food needs to tenderize or absorb moisture as it cooks.

**Plastic Wrap:** Plastic wrap is used for the same purpose as a casserole lid — to keep the heat and steam around your food. It can be used to cover dishes and serving bowls that have no lids. Use it for the same foods mentioned above, and do not use it unless you want your food to be steamed.

Plastic wrap may melt from the heat of steam or the food it touches. When you use plastic wrap, try to keep it from touching the food by wrapping it over the top of the dish containing the food. It melts easily if it touches the fat on meat because fat gets very hot. Microwaves will not melt the plastic wrap, the heat from the food does this.

If you have trouble with plastic wrap melting, switch to either the new Reynolds Plastic Wrap or Saran Wrap. These two brands of plastic wrap are made of a different type of plastic than other (cheaper) brands, and will not melt as quickly.

Many cookbooks or recipes will tell you to "vent" a corner of the plastic covering. This is to prevent a tightly sealed container from "exploding" from the pressure of steam building up inside it.

**Oven Cooking Bags:** These would be used like a casserole with a lid, or like plastic wrap: Use when you want to steam food or simmer it so moist heat can tenderize tough food. Be sure you do not seal the opening with a metal twist tie (it causes arcing). Seal the open end with a plastic fastener or cut a strip off the open end of the bag and tie it shut. Leaving the opening loosely closed will "vent" the bag.

**Waxed Paper:** When you cover food with waxed paper, it holds in some of the heat from the food, so foods cook more evenly than when left uncovered. It lets most of the steam escape from around the food, so food is not steamed. It also cuts down on spatters in the oven. Commercial waxed paper is so thinly waxed that the wax, if any should get on your food, is not noticeable or harmful. (Other types of waxed products, such as milk cartons or waxed product

coverings should not be used for cooking.)

Used waxed paper for covering roasts, poultry and other tender meats you are roasting; for covering food you are reheating, and for covering bar cookies. Use it for casseroles you would cook uncovered in your range oven.

**Paper Towels or Napkins:** As a top covering, these are about the same as waxed paper, but they will also absorb moisture from the food. Use these coverings to reduce spattering in the oven. They may also be used underneath food to absorb grease from foods like bacon or hamburgers.

A good use for paper towels is to use them for trapping steam that makes bread products soggy. For hot sandwiches or hotdogs: warm the meat alone, then put it in the roll or bread and wrap in a paper towel. Then heat briefly again until it is not. This two step techniques keeps the bread from getting overcooked (hard), and prevents sogginess.

**Aluminum Foil:** Never com-

pletely cover food with foil that you are cooking in your microwave. Microwaves can't penetrate foil, so the food would not cook (and you'd probably ruin your oven!). However, you can use foil as a "shield" to protect small areas of food from overcooking. Cover the corners of square baking pans, the ends of drumsticks and wings on poultry, and the edges of roasts. Use shielding when you are defrosting too, if one area starts to thaw too quickly.

When you use foil for shielding, keep the pieces of foil small. Keep the foil in the center of the oven, over one inch away from the walls or door. Do not let foil touch other metal, such as an oven rack or TV dinner tray. And when you turn the power on, look through the window to make sure there is no arcing (sparks) from the foil. If you see arcing, stop the oven immediately and reposition or remove the foil.

Well, that's about it as far as coverings go, but I bet you have one more question: "Should I cover everything I cook in the microwave?" No, but most things cook more evenly if covered with one of the coverings explained above.

Foods that are stirred frequently, such as scrambled eggs, puddings, gravy, etc. do not need to be covered. Also, I do not like to cover cakes I bake in the microwave, though many directions say to do so. When I cover cakes, the top cooks more quickly than the bottom and it is difficult to tell when they are done. Foods like roasts, poultry or casseroles that are loosely covered will be slightly moister than when left uncovered. Leave these uncovered for a drier surface.

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Fall is the best time to establish a new lawn, according to Penn State extension agronomist Jack Harper. There is less competition from weeds and the grass has two cool seasons, fall and spring, to develop an extensive root system before the hot summer months. Most turfgrass varieties in Pennsylvania grow best in cool weather.

There are several important steps to take to establish good turfgrass. Begin by having the soil tested to determine its lime and fertilizer requirements. Then rough grade the area to remove all debris and large stones. Apply lime and basic fertilizers (phosphorus and potassium) according to the soil test recommendations. If you plan to apply composted organic matter, spread it evenly on the surface at this point.

Incorporate all of the materials added to a depth of 4 to 6 inches with a rotovator. You can establish the final grade and remove small stones by hand or machine raking.

Select high-quality seed of a turfgrass variety suited to your specific climate and site. Divide seed into two equal parts. Using a mechanical seeder or spreader, sow one-half of the seed in one

direction and the other half at right angles to the first to assure complete coverage.

After seeding, rake or drag the area lightly to cover the seed. Do not cover the seed deeper than 1/4 inch. roll the area lightly to firm the soil around the seed.

Finally, mulch the area with clean straw or marsh hay. You may leave light mulches on to decompose, but remove heavy mulches as soon as the grass germinates. Water the area during dry spells of 10 days or more.

To help you become an expert in all areas of lawn care, you can send for a copy of Dr. Harper's correspondence course titled, "Lawn Care". to get the course, you send \$9.00, including handling, to LAWN CARE, Dept. 5000, University Park, PA 16802. Make check payable to PENN STATE.

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