

BASIC MICROWAVE TECHNIQUES

When you learn to cook in a microwave, you don't have to learn to cook all over again! But microwave cooking is different. Understanding these few basic microwave techniques will give you good, tender food instead of unevenly cooked, dried or burned food.

Let's start at the beginning. When microwaves enter food, they cause the food molecules (tiny particles) to vibrate. As the molecules vibrate millions of times each second, friction causes heat to build up quickly. This heat from the friction cooks the food. Rub your hands together and you can feel the heat friction produces. In an oversimplified sense, your food rubs itself cooked in a microwave oven!

Since microwaves heat food from the outside in to the center, a "problem" in microwave cooking is this: How to get the middle of

food cooked without burning the edges. The microwave cooking techniques that differ from range cooking are based on solving this problem.

These basic microwave cooking techniques are discussed in greater detail in microwave cookbooks if you need more information.

1. To get even cooking in your oven stir your food during the cooking time. This distributes the heat from the edges in to the center of the food. Stirring once or twice during the cooking or reheating time is usually all that's needed. Don't stir too much!

2. When you are cooking food on high power that you can't stir, arrange it in a doughnut shape whenever possible. If there's no food in the middle, it can't be cold when the edges are cooked! For example, put a meatloaf in a ring mold instead of a loaf pan. If you don't have a ring mold, use a casserole dish with a custard cup

or glass in the middle.

When freezing ground meat like hamburger, make a doughnut shaped patty with a hole in the middle so it defrosts evenly. (How many times have you defrosted hamburger and ended up with a lump of frozen meat in the middle surrounded by patches of cooked brown meat? A doughnut shape stops this!) Arrange separate foods like potatoes or cookies in a ring for even baking.

3. Larger food pieces like chicken parts can't be stirred, so these are rearranged during the cooking time. Rearranging means taking the pieces from the corners or edges and putting them in the center; then moving the center or least done pieces to the corners and the edges. If you have unevenly shaped food pieces, put the biggest ones around the edges of a container, so you won't have to arrange them.

There are two techniques to prevent drying out the edges of food like cakes or lasagna, where you can't stir, rearrange or use a doughnut shape.

4. The first (and best) is use a lower power. Instead of cooking these foods on high, turn your oven down to medium (50 percent power, which is listed as 50 or 5 on most oven brands). Turning the power down slows the rate at which the microwaves heat the edges of your food. This gives heat time to be conducted into the center evenly, but it takes longer to cook the food.

5. If you can't turn the power down, shield the edges of food with

foil to keep them from burning on high power. Put small strips of aluminum foil on the edges of roasts, over turkey drumsticks, and on the corners of a cake or lasagna pan. This keeps some of the microwave energy from penetrating in these small areas. Foil, even though it is metal, can be used in most ovens if you follow these rules:

- Keep foil one inch or more away from the walls and oven door.

- Don't let metal touch other metal, such as foil on an oven rack or a TV dinner tray.

- When using foil for shielding, check the oven for arching (sparks) when you turn the power on. If you see any arching, stop the oven and remove the source so the oven is not damaged.

6. Thick foods like roasts and turkeys should be turned over during the cooking time. Turning them over ensures even cooking of both the top and the bottom.

7. One last technique that is different from range cooking is allowing standing time for the foods to finish cooking. All foods, especially those cooked on high power, will cook a little more after they are removed from the microwave.

Standing time is time you let the

food stand somewhere to allow for this extra cooking. (Cover your food and just let it sit somewhere - you don't have to "stand" the bacon on edge!) It is the biggest difference between microwave and range cooking. Not allowing for this extra cooking causes many beginners to overcook their food.

The amount of standing time microwaved food needs isn't magic. The time is determined by the size and density of the food. Clip this for easy reference!

- Small, less dense food (eggs, breads, hot dogs, fish fillets) need only 2 to 3 minutes of standing time.

- Medium density or size food (vegetables, baked potatoes, chicken pieces, bar cookies, etc.) need 5 minutes standing time to get fully tender.

- Larger or denser food (casseroles, small roasts, whole poultry, cakes, pies, etc.) need about 10 minutes to stand.

- Very large meats (turkeys, big roasts, etc.) need about 15 minutes standing time.

Remember, hard or dry food has been overcooked. Food that is properly cooked in a microwave is juicy, moist and tender. Enjoy the cool microwave way of cooking on the hot days to come!

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Maryland To Hold Ethnic Festival

WESTMINSTER, Md.
- The Carroll County Farm Museum in Westminster, Maryland

will be hosting it's 3rd Annual Heritage/Ethnic Festival on July 20 from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Sponsored by the Carroll County Times, the day will feature Hungarian, Italian, Ukrainian and Native American dancers, as well as musicians playing Irish, Scottish, Canadian and German music. The Carribean Steel Band with their stilt dancer will also be performing.

Many countries will be represented by sales of a variety of foods from around the world.

Cultural exhibits will showcase the handiwork and life styles of the Ukraine, the Philippines, Lithuania, Scotland and many other nations.

Admission is \$2. For those six to 18 and 60 and over, the charge is \$1.50. Children under six are admitted free.



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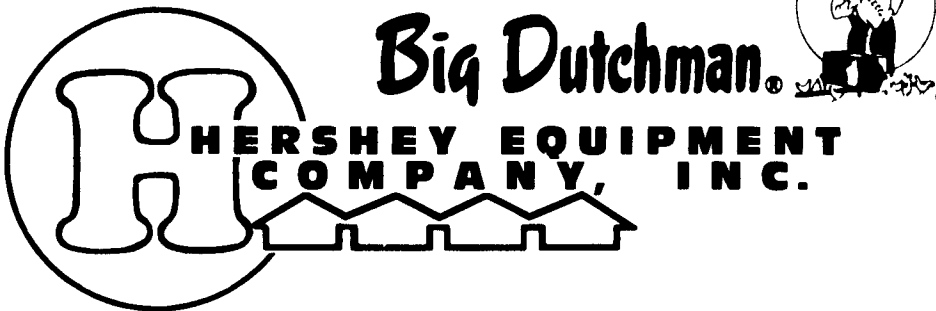
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