

Safety Tips For Barbecued Foods

NEWARK, Del. — The savory smells of sizzling steak, barbecued chicken and grill-cooked burgers—what summer celebration is complete without these? Barbecuing has been a long-time favorite for meat preparation, and it continues to grow in popularity, according to Debbie Amsden, University of Delaware extension home economist.

But along with the

summer heat comes the increased risk of microorganisms that can cause food poisoning. Amsden offers several safety precautions to help reduce food-poisoning risks.

Prepare all foods in a clean area with well-washed hands and utensils. Keep all foods refrigerated until preparation or grilling time. If meats are to be marinated, do so in a glass or plastic con-

tainer in the refrigerator for a minimum of six to eight hours before cooking. Turn the meat at least once to let the flavors penetrate.

The grill itself should be kept clean and free of food particles. To prepare the grill for cooking, rinse it in warm water then coat it with a non-stick vegetable spray. Or lightly rub the grill with vegetable oil to make clean-up easier and to

help keep food from sticking. Thoroughly wash the grill in hot water and soap after each use.

When building the fire, be sure it is hot enough to properly cook the meat. "A good rule is to use thirty briquets to grill one pound of meat," Amsden advises. "Cook all meats at a low to moderate temperature unless a recipe indicates otherwise."

To judge the temperature of the fire, hold your hand at the cooking height, palm side down. "Count the number of seconds you can hold your hand in that position before the heat

forces you to pull it away. At low to moderate temperatures you should be able to hold your hand over the heat for four or five seconds," the home economist says.

To increase grill temperature, move the grill closer to the coals or push the coals together. To lower grill temperature, raise the grill higher and spread coals apart.

Be sure food is fully cooked before serving. The time it takes to cook the meat depends on the position of the grill, weather, temperature of the coals and degree of doneness desired. Meats should be tested for doneness while

they're cooking.

To test steaks and chops, make a slit near the bone and check the color. "Depending on the thickness of the meat and how well you want it cooked, it can take anywhere from 15 to 50 minutes to completely cook," Amsden says.

Poultry is done when the meat pulls easily from the bone and the thighs and drumsticks move easily.

Fish should be cut at the thickest part and tested with a fork. The meat will flake when the fish is cooked. Shellfish will turn a milky color and become opaque when properly cooked.

Larger cuts of meat—whole hams or roasts—require a meat thermometer to test for doneness. Amsden also recommends that larger cuts sit for 15 minutes before carving.

When food is fully cooked, place it on a clean plate or serving dish, not on the same plate used to bring raw food to the grill. The uncooked food may have left some microorganisms on the plate. All plates used to carry uncooked food should be thoroughly washed before being used again.

When the meal is over, promptly put away all foods and leftovers.

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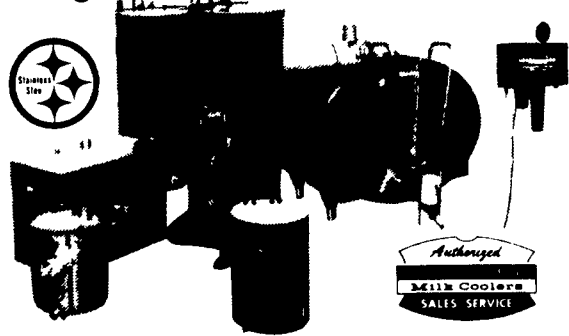
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