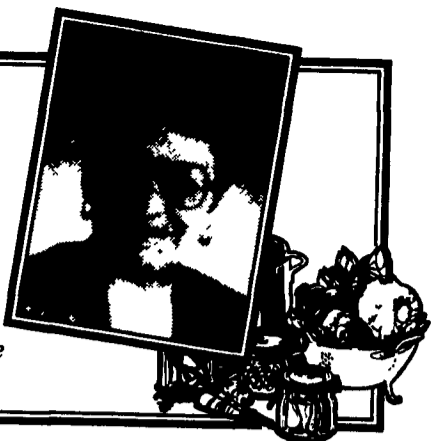


Consuming Thoughts

by
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In my last column I discussed how to microwave safely when defrosting and cooking. As a follow-up . . . today's column will feature the latest information from USDA on warming precooked foods and what utensils and wraps to use when microwaving.

Warming Precooked Foods

- Cover precooked foods with microwave-safe plastic, waxed paper or a glass lid. This will keep moisture in and provide even cooking.

- Heat leftovers and precooked food to at least 165°F. Food should be very hot to the touch and steaming before it is served.

- Use caution when warming baby food. Stir toddler foods thoroughly and taste-test them yourself for child-safe temperatures. Shake milk or formula in a bottle before tasting as it can become extremely hot.

Suggested utensils, wraps and cookware to use in the microwave. Glass and glass ceramic

cookware are safe for microwave cooking. But what about other materials?

- Use only those containers and products that have been approved for microwave use. These items are designed to withstand the high temperatures possible when cooking foods that have a high fat or sugar content.

- Avoid the use of cold storage containers. Margarine tubs, whipped topping bowls and cottage cheese cartons, for example, have not been approved for microwaving. High heat could cause chemicals to transfer into the food.

- Waxed paper is safe. Other paper goods such as towels, plates and napkins have not been tested for use in cooking. If using these items, for optimal safety, use only plain white paper goods.

- Never use brown grocery bags and newspaper. These contain recycled materials and metals, which could start a fire.

- Avoid letting plastic wrap touch foods during microwaving. It's fine to cover utensils with

plastic wrap, but unless the wrap is a heavy-duty type, it could melt in contact with hot foods.

- Oven cooking bags are safe for use in the microwave. They are made from very tough nylon materials. Oven bags also promote even cooking, which helps meat reach safe temperatures throughout.

- Follow package directions when heating microwavable foods with special browning or crisping devices in the package. Never try to reuse these special browning

devices. Don't eat from a package that becomes "charred" in cooking. Handle carefully, they become very hot to the touch.

- Do not re-use trays and containers provided with microwave convenience products. They have been designed for one-time use with that specific food only.

If you have additional questions about safely cooking meat and poultry in the microwave oven call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555.

Library Offers 4-H Babysitting Course For Teens

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — Do you wish you could babysit? Young people ages 11-14 are invited to a program that will help prepare them to become a better babysitter.

A six-week course, "4-H Babysitting and Child Care" will be offered on Wednesdays at the Bala Cynwyd Library, located on N. Highland and Old Lancaster

Road, this spring.

The course begins March 29 and concludes on May 3, running from 4 p.m.-5:30 p.m. There is no charge and all course materials will be provided by the 4-H program. Participants will become 4-H members as a result of taking the course.

To register for the course, call the library at (215) 664-1196.

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