

Consuming Thoughts

by
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Penn State Extension Home
Economist For Berks Co.



Many of us are already thinking about the holidays. We want to get the house ready for friends and family members who will be visiting. One area of concern to the cook will be the kitchen.

Will it pass Aunt Mabel's white glove inspection?

More importantly, could it pass a food safety inspection?

If not, these guidelines will get your kitchen in tip-top shape for the holidays.

Start with the freezer. Is it frozen-over or jam-packed with

foods? If so, it will not hold frozen meat and poultry at safe freezer temperatures 0 degrees F or below. When you defrost the freezer, examine frozen items carefully and discard foods that have changed in appearance or texture. When returning food to the freezer check package dates and sort items so that you can use them within recommended storage times.

Next, the refrigerator. If you have leftover meat and poultry dishes, use them as soon as possi-

ble. These foods can be stored in the refrigerator from three to four days. Fresh meat and poultry should be used within one to three days. Also check the "sell-by" or "use-by" date on mayonnaise, salad dressing and other foods which need refrigeration. Throw away outdated, moldy and obviously spoiled foods.

To get rid of the odor that may linger from spoiled foods, wash the refrigerator with baking soda and water and put a box of baking soda in it to absorb odors. To store food safely in the freshly cleaned refrigerator be sure that the temperature is set at 40 degrees F or below to prevent most bacterial growth. Tightly cover all foods and use them within the recommended storage time. Don't overload the refrigerator. Cold air must be able to circulate to keep foods at optimal temperatures.

Countertops, sinks, and utensils need extra care. To keep bacteria from spreading from raw to cooked foods, wash the countertop, sink and utensils after they

have been used to prepare raw meat and poultry. Carefully scrub, clean and sanitize plastic cutting board. Old wooden cutting boards should be used as hot pads and not for cutting food because bacteria can harbor in the grooves left by the knife. A hard, non-porous cutting board is better for preventing the spread of bacteria. Also, wash kitchen linen often and throw away old sponges.

Kitchen appliances should work properly. Use the oven thermometer to check the temperature in your conventional oven. Use a meat thermometer to cook meat and poultry to the proper internal temperatures. Poultry is thoroughly cooked at 180 F to 185 F; beef and other meats should reach 160

F. For questions about meat and poultry call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-800-535-4555.

Check the microwave oven too. Stale food particles left in the microwave can interfere with cooking time. To clean the microwave oven, place a mixture of lemon juice and water inside the oven and turn it on. The steam will condense on the oven surface and make food much easier to remove. The lemon juice will absorb odors.

"Alternative Household Cleaning Solutions" is available from our office, just send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Berks County Cooperative Extension, Berks County Ag Center, 1238 County Welfare Rd., Leesport, PA 19533-0520.

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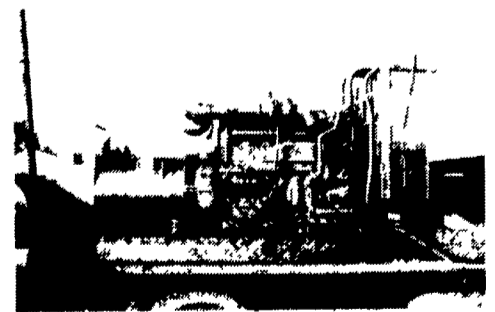
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