

**Family Living  
Focus**

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**Cook It Safely**  
Cook food to the "T"-temperature that is.

You can improve the quality of food, as well as safety, by using a thermometer. Judging "doneness" by how a food looks works fairly well with scrambled eggs and some fish, but it doesn't work well for hamburgers, roasts, turkey, chicken, meat loaves, and egg casseroles.

It is important to cook food to an internal temperature that destroys harmful bacteria. If you don't, you could get sick.

Hamburgers are a good example. In a study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 25 percent of the hamburgers tested turned brown before they reached a safe internal temperature.

On the flip side, some patties remained pink on the inside even when cooked well above a safe temperature. This is particularly true of frozen, pre-formed patties. The conclusion: color is not a good indicator of doneness or safety. As a result, USDA recommends using a thermometer to test the doneness of hamburgers, as well as other meat and poultry products.

In a consumer food safety survey last year, fewer than half of those interviewed owned a food thermometer. Only three percent used one on a regular basis when cooking hamburgers.

Don't own a food thermometer? Have one but it doesn't work, or you can't find it?

It's time to think about getting one. Besides making sure that food gets cooked to a safe temperature, thermometers take the guesswork out of cooking and can prevent over-cooking.

The most common and versatile food thermometer is the bi-metallic stemmed thermometer. These are available at most kitchen or grocery stores for less than \$5. Check the range of the thermometer on it. Meat and all-purpose thermometers generally read from 0° to 220° F. Candy thermometers measure above the temperature of boiling water.

If you are into gourmet kitchenware, you might want to invest in a digital thermometer. These measure temperatures through a metal probe or sensing area, and display the results on a digital readout. They come in many sizes and are priced from \$10 to \$35. Because the sensor is located in the tip of the probe, they are ideal for measuring the temperature of thin foods such as hamburgers and chicken breasts.

How do you know if your thermometer is accurate? The best way is to use the ice water test. Fill a large glass with finely crushed ice. Add clean water to the top of the ice and stir well. Immerse the thermometer stem at least two inches into the mixture. The thermometer should read 32° F after 30 seconds. If it doesn't, adjust the calibration nut to the correct temperature.

What temperatures are recommended for safety's sake?

USDA recommends cooking to the following internal temperatures:

- Ground Beef - 160° F
- Roasts and Steaks - 145° F
- Poultry (chicken breasts) - 170° F
- Whole poultry (turkey, chicken) - 180° F
- Leftovers, at least 165° F

**If A Tree Falls In Your Neighbor's Yard,  
Does It Make A Lawsuit?**

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.)—Poetry readers know there is nothing so lovely as a tree. Unfortunately, poetry goes out the window and accusations can get pretty ugly when trees are involved in legal disputes, said a community forestry expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Most homeowners expect everyone to love their trees because they do," said Bill Elmendorf, urban and community forestry program coordinator and instructor in the School of Forest Resources. "In reality, a neighbor downwind may hate raking the tree's leaves, the tree may have invasive roots or it may block views. If the tree is falling, it may fall on houses, cars or people."

Elmendorf explains that few homeowners understand the laws and legal rights that apply to trees. In addition, most people have no idea that ornamental trees can have a monetary value that can be recovered in court should anything happen to it.

"Some trees can be replaced easily for about \$500 to \$2,500," Elmendorf says. "An older or landmark tree, believe it or not, can have an assigned value of

\$25,000 to \$60,000, based on size, species, condition and location."

Homeowners should know several key points about trees and the law:

•Who owns the tree? If a tree's trunk is entirely on a homeowner's property, the tree belongs to that homeowner. If the tree straddles the boundary between two properties, the tree is owned jointly by both landowners. "You can't remove it or prune it without the other owner's permission, and you can't prune it to the extent that it will damage the community property of the tree," Elmendorf says.

•Can you trim your neighbor's tree? Property owners have the absolute right to trim back a tree's branches and roots that reach over into their yard. "The property owner only can prune up to the boundary line. Hopefully the pruning will be done correctly," Elmendorf says.

•When am I responsible for damage or injuries caused by my trees? Homeowners are responsible for maintaining their property's trees. "Ignorance is no excuse," Elmendorf warns. "The landowner has two duties: reasonable inspection and care to make sure the tree is safe."

•If my tree falls down, is it an act of God? Elmendorf cites the book "Arboriculture and the Law": "An act of God represents some inevitable event that could not be prevented by human care, skill or foresight, but which re-

sults exclusively from nature's cause, lightning, tempest and floods." Does that mean a homeowner is liable? "All these laws are open to interpretation," Elmendorf says. That's why we have lawyers and courts. The key is to act as a reasonable person should act."

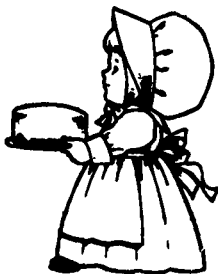
•Can someone remove a tree from my property? No, unless the tree is an imminent hazard to people or property. If a neighbor or a person working for the neighbor removes a tree from the homeowners property, the neighbor may be found liable for replacing the value of the tree.

"A qualified arborist can estimate the value of a tree according to a formula created by the International Society of Arborists," Elmendorf says.

•If my neighbor's apple tree extends into my yard, can I eat the fruit? The fruit of a tree belongs to the owner. Although laws are unclear about fallen fruit, a landowner cannot pick fruit from a neighbor's tree. "Neighbors also cannot prune branches in order to get the fruit," Elmendorf says.

"The best course of action in any dispute involving trees is direct communication," Elmendorf says. "Go and talk with your neighbor first and try to work out a solution. If you have to go to court, because of the high value an ornamental tree can have, make sure you have a good lawyer and a good arborist."

When food is not cooked hot enough to stop bacteria growth or kill the bacteria that are present, you put your self at risk of becoming ill. Why take the chance? Learn more about food safety by contacting your county extension office.



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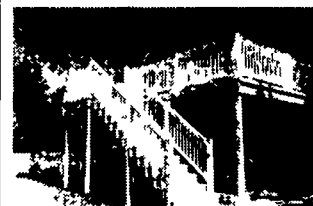


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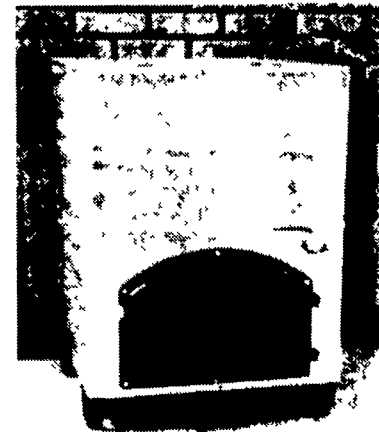
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