

Family Living.
Focus
 by
Mary Alice Gettings
 Beaver Co.
 Extension Agent



With the purchase of more fresh fruits and vegetables in the summer and the warm temperatures, those fuzzy creatures called molds seem to be more frequent. While this is a very common problem, it does not necessarily have a simple answer. What you do concerning the mold depends on the type of food.

Mold usually gets a "bad rap." Believe it or not, there are "good" molds. Molds considered beneficial and safe are those needed to make many cheeses. For example, it is normal to have mold inside of Roquefort and Gorgonzola and on the surface of Brie and Camembert. What is not normal is to have molds on cheeses like cheddar, mozzarella, and provolone. If you did not buy it with mold, it should not be eaten with mold.

Molds are threadlike organisms (fungi) that live on plant or

animal matter and produce spores. Unlike bacteria, molds can be seen with the naked eye. What you can't distinguish are the three different parts of the mold the root threads, stalks, and spores. The root threads are the parts that invade the food that the mold lives on, and you probably won't be able to see them because they are so thin. When a food shows heavy mold growth, the root threads have invaded deep into the food. The stalks rise above the food, and the spores form at the end of the stalks. Air, water, and insects can transport these spores. It is the various spores that provide the different colors of molds on food and that allow the mold to reproduce when spread to another area.

The reason some molds can be dangerous is due to the fact that they produce toxins that can spread throughout the food and

make you sick. The poisonous toxins that are formed are called mycotoxins and can be found in grain and nut crops, along with celery, grape juice, apples, and other produce.

The most well known mycotoxin is aflatoxin, a cancer-causing poison found in field corn and peanuts. The United States Department of Agriculture monitors these two foods for aflatoxin and will remove any with unacceptable levels.

So what do you do with the cheese in your refrigerator that has mold on it? If it is a hard cheese, like cheddar, cut off at least one inch around and below the mold. It is important to keep the knife away from the mold so that it does not cross-contaminate an area that is mold-free. If the cheese was made with mold, but it has additional growth on the inside as compared to when you purchased it, throw it away. If the mold is on the surface of these cheeses, handle it like you would hard cheese. Soft cheeses, like cottage and cream, along with crumbled, shredded, and sliced cheeses should be thrown away.

When it comes to firm fruits and vegetables with low-moisture content, like cabbage, carrots, and apples, you can cut away one inch around and below the mold. If mold is found on soft fruits

and vegetables with high-moisture content, like peaches, cucumbers, and tomatoes, the entire piece of fruit should be thrown away. Fruits and vegetables that become moldy in a bag should also be discarded. While most meats with mold should be thrown away, hard salami and dry-cured country hams can be safely eaten if you scrub the mold off the surface.

Almost any food can grow mold. The following is a list of foods you should immediately discard if mold is found on them: luncheon meats, bacon, and hot dogs cooked leftover meat, poultry, and casseroles cooked grain and pasta yogurt and sour cream jams and jellies soft fruits and vegetables bread and baked goods peanut butter, legumes, and nuts

There are several measures you can take to minimize mold growth. Cleanliness is vital in controlling these nasty creatures, which can build up in your refrigerator and on dishcloths. A few simple practices will help you to minimize their growth. First, clean the inside of your refrigerator every few months with one tablespoon of baking soda dissolved in one quart of water. Rinse it with clear water and allow to dry. If mold is visible, scrub it with three teaspoons of unscented bleach mixed with one quart of water. Second, keep cleaning supplies, like dishcloths, towels, sponges, and mops, clean and fresh. A musty smell means the mold is spreading. And third, since molds like a humid environment, try to keep your house at 40 percent or less humidity.

For food safety information, call your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office or check out Penn State's Food Safety website at www.psu.edu/food. You can also call the USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at (800) 535-4555.

New NFC Apple Juice Developed

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — Cornell University food science and technology researchers at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, N.Y., have developed a 100 percent not-from-concentrate (NFC) fresh apple juice.

The juice will be produced at IFP North America New York's (IFPNANY) proposed fruit processing and juice packaging plant in LeRoy, N.Y.

"We're thankful to the food scientists at Cornell for creating such a fantastic product," said Herbert Fiss, IFPNANY president. "Once consumers get a taste of it, I'm confident it will be a big hit in the market place. NFC apple juice is a premium quality product that promotes good health. According to recent medical reports, apples have been linked to reduced cancer risk, better lung function, positive impact against LDL cholesterol, and numerous other health benefits."

"We were able to develop an excellent product with fresh apple flavor and extended shelf life," said Olga Padilla-Zakour, of the department of food science and technology at Cornell, who was the lead scientist for the project. "We were able to take advantage of the unique flavor profiles of New York apples and are very satisfied with the result."

NFC apple juice is made by pressing apples for juice and then pasteurized. The juice will be filled and packaged into gable-top containers with spouts at the proposed LeRoy plant and sold in the refrigerated section of supermarkets.

"Based on the market potential for NFC apple juice, more than five million bushels of New York-grown apples are expected to be utilized at the LeRoy plant when at full capacity for producing the NFC apple juice product," Fiss said. "Two major supermarket chains were asked to sample the product and both had extremely favorable reactions."

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