



Food safety tips for cooking on the grill

We love cooking on the grill. Are there special food safety tips we should keep in mind?

Absolutely. Food safety should always be a consideration, no matter where you're doing the cooking. But yes, there are special considerations when cooking outdoors, mainly because there are so many things to think about: How hot is the fire? How long should the food be cooked? How easy is it to keep serving plates and utensils clean?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service has a "Barbecue and Food Safety" fact sheet at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/, under "Seasonal Food Safety." It offers solid food safety guidelines, most of which apply to any food preparation situation.

Whether you're just venturing out on your back deck or taking a road trip to your favorite picnic area, here are some official suggestions specifically for outdoor food safety:

- Keep things clean. Assume that the raw meat and poultry you're about to cook contains harmful bacteria. That means using a clean plate and utensils for the cooked food — don't use the same ones you used to handle the raw meat unless you are able to wash them thoroughly. If you're heading to a park area, find out if clean water is available. If not, be sure to bring water, clean cloths and wet towelettes.

- Use a food thermometer to test meat for doneness. Safe minimum internal temperatures are: 165

degrees Fahrenheit for poultry; 160 F for beef hamburgers, all cuts of pork; beef, veal or lamb steaks, roasts and chops should be cooked to 145 F for medium rare or 160 F for medium. If you're staying at home, precooking food partially in the microwave, oven or stove is a good way of reducing grilling time. Just make sure that the food goes immediately on the preheated grill to complete cooking — never partially cook meat or poultry and wait before you finish cooking it. That allows too great of an opportunity for bacteria to grow: Even though the bacteria itself would be killed when the food is thoroughly cooked, some types produce toxins that remain in the meat until it gets to your gut.

- If you're heading out to a park for your picnic, be sure to keep food cold to minimize bacterial growth. Use an insulated cooler with sufficient ice or ice packs to keep the food at 40 F or below. Keep perishables refrigerated as long as possible, and pack the cooler just before leaving the house. It's best to use a separate cooler for beverages and other non-perishable foods; that way you can keep the other cooler closed until you're ready to cook, keeping the cold air inside. Keep coolers in the shade to keep the food inside as cool as possible.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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