

CONSUMER INFORMATION FROM USDA

Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Safety & Consumer
Education Office

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Barbecue Food Safety

Get Ready!

Warm weather is the ideal time to cook out: more people cook outdoors in summer than any other time of the year.

But warm temperatures are also ideal for bacteria and other pathogens to multiply and cause foodborne illness. Use these simple guidelines for grilling food safely.

FROM THE STORE: HOME FIRST. When shopping for meat and poultry, put them in the shopping cart last, right before checkout. To guard against cross contamination -- which can happen when raw meat or poultry juices drip on other foods -- put packages of raw meat and poultry into plastic bags.

Load meat and poultry into the air conditioned car--not the trunk--and take the groceries straight home. In the summer if home is more than a 30-minute drive away, bring a cooler with ice from home and place perishable food in it for the trip.

At home, place meat and poultry in the refrigerator immediately. Freeze poultry and ground meat that won't be used in 1 or 2 days; freeze other meat within 4 to 5 days.

DEFROST SAFELY. Completely thaw meat and poultry before grilling so it cooks more evenly. Use the refrigerator for slow, safe thawing; microwave defrost if the food will be placed immediately on the grill; or thaw sealed packages in cold water.

Get Set!

"Marinade or marinate?"

These English words come from the Italian word "marinato."

Marinade (MAIR-uh-naid) is a savory acidic sauce in which a food is soaked to enrich its flavor or to tenderize it.

Marinate (MAIR-uh-nait) is a verb which means to steep food in a marinade.

MARINATING. Some recipes state to marinate meat and poultry for several hours or days, either to tenderize or add flavor. Always marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter.

If some of the marinade is to be used as a sauce on the cooked food, reserve a portion of the marinade. Don't put raw meat and poultry in it. Don't reuse the marinade used on raw meat or poultry unless it's boiled first to destroy any bacteria.

PRE-COOKING. Some people like to cook food partially in the microwave oven or stove to reduce grilling time. Pre-cook immediately before grilling to destroy bacteria.

Call Toll-free For More Information:

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1 (800) 535-4555

Washington DC (202) 720-3333
Internet <http://www.usda.gov/fsis>

Go!

TRANSPORTING. When carrying food to a picnic site, keep it cold to minimize bacterial growth. If take-out foods such as fried chicken or barbecued beef will be reheated on the grill, and they won't be eaten within two hours of pickup, buy them ahead of time and chill thoroughly.

Use an insulated cooler with sufficient ice or ice packs to keep the food at 40° F. Then pack food right from the refrigerator into the cooler immediately before leaving home.

In the car, keep the cooler in the air conditioned passenger compartment; at the picnic, in the shade or shelter.

KEEP COLD FOOD COLD. Avoid opening the cooler's lid, which lets cold air out and warm air in. Pack beverages in one cooler and perishables in another cooler.

When handling raw meat, remove from the cooler only the amount that will fit on the grill.

KEEP EVERYTHING CLEAN. Be sure there are plenty of clean utensils and platters for separately handling the raw foods and the food after cooking.

Don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Any bacteria present in raw meat or juices can contaminate the safely cooked meat. This is a prime cause of summer foodborne illness.

Pack clean, soapy sponges, cloths and wet towelettes for cleaning surfaces and hands.

Barbecue Food Safety

“Barbecue” is the preferred way dictionary and publication style guides recommend spelling the cooking method of spit roasting a whole animal over an open fire or pit.

The word origin is the American Spanish word “barbacoa.” Bar-B-Q, barbeque and B-B-Q are coined words.

A grill is a utensil made of parallel bars on which food is cooked, usually over a fire or electricity. Grilling food is similar to broiling over direct heat.

Smoking is cooking food indirectly over a fire.

But however you prefer to spell it, or whatever you call it, barbecuing food SAFELY is what’s important.

Cook Thoroughly

Meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside. Use a meat thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe internal temperature, and cut into the food to check for visual signs of doneness.

Whole poultry should reach 180° F; breasts, 170° F. Juices should run clear and flesh should not be pink. Hamburgers made of any ground meat or poultry should reach 160° F, or be **brown in the middle with no pink juices**. Beef, veal and lamb steaks, roasts and chops can be cooked to 145° F. All cuts of pork should reach 160° F.

NEVER partially grill meat or poultry and finish cooking later. Cook food completely to destroy harmful bacteria. When reheating take-out foods or fully cooked meats like hot dogs, grill to 165° F, or until steaming hot.

Grill Out!

KEEP HOT FOODS HOT! After cooking meat and poultry on the grill - at home or on a picnic -- keep it hot until served. Keep the cooked meats hot by setting them to the side of the grill rack, not directly over the coals where they would eventually overcook.

At home, the cooked meat can be kept hot in a 200° F oven, in a chafing dish or slow cooker, or on a warming tray. After cooking, hold hot food at 140° F or warmer.

SERVING THE FOOD. When taking food off the grill, don’t put the cooked items on the same platter which held the raw meat. Any bacteria present in the raw meat juices could contaminate the safely cooked meat or other grilled foods.

In hot weather (90° F and above), food should never sit out for more than one hour.

HANDLING LEFTOVERS. At home, store leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer within 2 hours of taking food off the grill. Leftovers that have been off the grill for less than 1 hour can be safely transported home in a cooler -- if there’s plenty of ice in it.

Discard any food left out more than 2 hours (1 hour in hot weather).

Safe Grilling Checks

- Take meat and poultry straight home from the store and refrigerate.
- Marinate foods in refrigerator.
- Don’t reuse marinade unless boiled.
- Pre-cook immediately before placing food on grill.
- Don’t use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meats.

SAFE SMOKING TECHNIQUES

Grilling slowly over indirect heat in a closed charcoal cooker is called “smoking.” It is used to add flavor to large cuts of meat and keep them tender. It can require up to 8 hours, depending on the meat’s size and the outdoor air temperature.

Use high quality charcoal to build a hot fire. Pile about 50 briquets in the center, and when they are covered with grey ash, push them into two piles. Center a pan of water between the two piles.

Wood chips such as mesquite are used for additional flavor. Using dry chips at the start creates a fast smoke; wet them later for sustained heat.

Center the food on the grill over the water pan, close the lid and keep the grill vents open. The temperature in the smoker should be maintained at 250° to 300° F for safety. Add about 9 coals every 1 to 2 hours.

PIT ROASTING

For information on pit roasting a whole animal, contact local or state extension offices, or a land-grant university.

Does Grilling Pose a Cancer Risk?

*Some studies have suggested there may be a cancer risk related to eating food cooked by such high heat cooking techniques as grilling, frying and broiling. Based on present research findings, eating moderate amounts of grilled meats like fish, meat and poultry cooked **without charring** to a safe, yet medium temperature does not pose a problem. To avoid charring, microwave meat partly done immediately before placing it on the grill and remove visible fat than can drip on the coals and cause a flame-up.*