Safe Summer Outdoor Grilling

Memorial Day marks the beginning of the summer grilling season. Grilling, one of the easiest low-fat cooking methods, can be a centerpiece for summertime meals. When grilling, as with other food preparation methods, it is important to follow food handling and safety guidelines.

Grills need annual cleaning after winter storage by scouring the grate with a grill brush. Spray the grid with oven cleaner and rinse thoroughly. Before each use, apply non-stick cooking spray to prevent food from sticking to the grill. Be sure to also remove any charred food debris to reduce exposure to possible cancer-causing substances formed during high heat cooking.

Position the grill on a well-ventilated, flat, level surface away from overhangs, deck railings and shrubbery. Keep children and pets away from the grill when in use.

Preheat the grill before placing food on grilling surface. Avoid fire flare-ups by using lean meats and trimming away all visible fat.

Use proper tools. Tongs and a spatula help to turn food without piercing it to lose any juices. A vegetable grilling basket holds smaller foods. Other useful utensils include flame retardant mitts to protect hands.

Keep meat cold until ready to grill. Do not leave it out at room temperature. If starting with frozen products, thaw in the refrigerator or microwave before grilling.
Partially cooking meat in the microwave or oven to reduce grilling time is safe only if the food then goes immediately onto the grill. If you are precooking ahead of time, be certain to cook the meat thoroughly to destroy all bacteria, then refrigerate. Meat can then be reheated on the grill will give a barbecued flavor.

Marinades enhance flavors, tenderize and keep foods moist. Marinate meats in the refrigerator, not on the kitchen counter, so bacteria won’t have a chance to grow. If you want to use some marinade for a dip or basting sauce, reserve a portion in advance. Don’t reuse marinade that’s been on raw meat.

Meat and poultry should be thoroughly cooked, however meat and poultry cooked on a grill often browns very fast on the outside. Use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe, minimum, internal temperature as color alone cannot be used to assure the meat has been properly cooked. Visit www.FoodSafety.gov for recommended cooking temperatures.

Do not use the same platter or utensils to handle raw and cooked products. Wash any utensils and plates that have come in contact with raw meat before using them for cooked foods. Be sure to keep vegetables or fruits that are intended for grilling separate from raw meat.

Place leftovers in the refrigerator, dividing larger quantities into small, shallow containers so the food will cool more quickly, with less chance for bacteria to grow. Discard any food left out more than two hours or one hour if the temperature is above 90 degrees F. When in doubt, throw it out!

Foodborne illness increases in warm weather. Following four simple steps – wash hands and surfaces often, keep foods separate, don’t cross-contaminate, cook foods to the proper temperatures and refrigerate promptly will reduce the risk of foodborne illness during the summer grilling season.

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