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Food Facts For You!

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Food Safety and Avian Influenza; Summer Food Preservation Workshops; Make-Ahead Frozen Foods; Clean and Green; What's On Your Mind? (contacting home appliance and cookware vendors)

Food Safety and Avian Influenza

Avian influenza, it appears, it a concern that may be with us for the foreseeable future. Here are some points that will help answer questions related to food safety and this disease (from the international Food and Agriculture Organization).

- Conventional cooking (temperatures at or above 160°F in all parts of a food item) will inactivate the H5N1 virus. Properly cooked poultry meat is therefore safe to consume.
- The H5N1 virus, if present in poultry meat, is not killed by refrigeration or freezing.
- Home slaughtering and preparation of sick or dead poultry for food may be hazardous, especially in areas where the disease has been noted. This practice in infected areas must be stopped.
- Eggs can contain the H5N1 virus both on the outside (shell) and the inside (whites and yolk). Eggs from areas with H5N1 outbreaks in poultry should not be consumed raw or partially cooked (runny yolk); uncooked eggs should not be used in foods that will not be cooked, baked or heat-treated in other ways.
- There is no epidemiological evidence to indicate that people have been infected with the H5N1 virus following consumption of properly cooked poultry or eggs.
- The greatest risk of exposure to the virus is through the handling and slaughter of live infected poultry. Good hygiene practices are essential during slaughter and post-slaughter handling to prevent exposure via raw poultry meat or cross contamination from poultry to other foods, food preparation surfaces or equipment

Summer Food Preservation Workshops

Four Master Food Preservation workshops have been scheduled for this summer! My thanks to the educators who have agreed to help in these efforts. The planning group will be meeting via Wisline in a few weeks. I urge you to contact the individuals listed below if you, or others in your county, would like to take advantage of this training. The training normally runs from 9 am until 3 pm each day; the exact locations and guidelines for this year's training will be released over the next few months.

Master Food Preserver Training Summer 2006		
June13-15 (tentative)	Contact: Lucia Patritto Iron County	715-561-2695 lucia.patritto@ces.uwex.edu
June 27-29	Contact: Dianne Weber Washburn County Fairgrounds, Spooner	715-635-4444 dianne.weber@ces.uwex.edu

July 11-13	Contact: Donna Doll Yogerst Washington Middle School, Oconto Falls	920-834-6845 donna.doll-yogerst@ces.uwex.edu
July 24-26	Contact: Gayle Rose Martinez Owen High School, Owen	715-743-5121 gaylerose.martinez@ces.uwex.edu

I hope that new educators programming in the area of food preservation will take advantage of these classes. Please don't hesitate to contact me, or the individuals listed, for more details.

The **So Easy to Preserve** DVDs are on their way. Each county will receive a copy of this 2-DVD set. Included are:

Disc 1

- Canning Tomatoes
- Canning Vegetables
- Canning Fruits
- Freezing Foods
- Home Canning Basics

Disc 2

- Pickling
- Jams and Jellies
- Specialities (hot chile salsa, mango chutney)
- Drying Foods
- Home Canning Basics

Each segment is approximately 25 minutes long – perfect for an overview at an HCE or Master Gardeners' meeting. Please consider using and promoting this valuable resource in your county this year.

Tips for Frozen Storage and Reheating of Food

During the cold winter months, it can be fun to be in a warm kitchen, preparing food ahead for those busy spring weeks when there is yard work and gardening to do in addition to the normal chores. The following are some tips on preparing, and freezing, food ahead:

- Don't overcook food items that are intended for the freezer, and be particularly careful to slightly undercook pasta, rice, and vegetables. [Note: baked goods, however, should be fully cooked.]
- Cool all foods completely by setting meals in the refrigerator for at least an hour before freezing.
- Package items for the freezer in moisture-proof, airtight and odorless containers.
 - Examples: zip-top plastic freezer bags (not food storage bags); rigid plastic or glass containers with wide mouths and tight-fitting lids; or heavy duty aluminum foil
 - Plan ahead for those foods that will go from the freezer to the oven. Package casseroles and other items that you will cook from the frozen state in aluminum trays or Pyrex cookware; cover with heavy-duty aluminum foil.
- Make certain all freezer containers are sealed completely and that you've removed excess air before sealing. [Air trapped in a container can react with the food, destroying nutrients and producing off flavors during extended storage.]
- Don't forget to label each package (try a permanent ink marker) with reheating instructions before freezing. Include the name of the meal, date frozen, number of servings, temperature and length of time it bakes, and any other necessary information. You can add any personal notes such as marking extra stars for your favorites.

Check list for high quality make-ahead frozen food:

- Food is packaged in small portions.
- Food is packaged in shallow containers.
- Container or packaging fits the shape and size of the food to be frozen.

- ☑ Food is packed tightly to eliminate as much air space as possible.
- ☑ Container or packaging is almost full, leaving only a little space for the food to expand as it freezes.
- ☑ Excess air is pressed from freezer bags.
- ☑ Container or bag is tightly sealed.
- ☑ Contents of freezer are organized so wrappings don't become loose or pierced.
- ☑ Packages are labeled with a freezer marker indicating the contents, number of servings, and date of storage.
- ☑ Food is placed in a single layer on freezer shelves until frozen.
- ☑ Freezer is set to and maintains 0 degrees or below
- ☑ Freezer is not freezing too much food at a time.
- ☑ An inventory identifying each food in the freezer and its "use by" date is posted on the outside of the freezer and is updated each time an item is removed.
- ☑ Food is thawed in refrigerator unless otherwise directed. Note: This may take longer than overnight or even 24 hours.

Clean and Green

Keeping your house, and especially your kitchen, clean is one important way to fight the germs that can cause foodborne illness or food spoilage. But you don't have to spend a lot of money on fancy cleaners to get the job done. Having these five common products in your kitchen will help you deal with many cleaning tasks: detergent or dish soap, vinegar, baking soda, borax, and bleach. Here are a few suggestions on how to economically clean your kitchen 'on a shoestring'.

WARNING: Never mix chlorine bleach and ammonia. Toxic fumes can be produced if chlorine and ammonia are mixed together. This warning also applies to any product containing chlorine bleach, such as a cleanser, and ammonia.

Vinegar can add sparkle to your kitchen. Vinegar is a mild acid, and it can certainly come in handy in the kitchen. Mix a solution of equal amounts of white vinegar and water to perk up your coffee pot. Add the vinegar/water mixture to the water reservoir of your coffee pot and run through one brew cycle. Rinse the coffee carafe and then add an equal amount of clear, cool water to the water reservoir and brew again.

Use vinegar to perk up your dishes too. Add a few drops of vinegar to your dishwashing water to cut grease and leave dishes sparkling clean.

And vinegar can come in handy to clean kitchen floors. Use 1 Tablespoon vinegar per quart of warm water to clean wood floors. To remove animal stains from a carpet or rug, prepare a solution of ½ cup white vinegar and 1 quart warm water. Apply with a damp sponge to the carpet or rug and allow to stand a few minutes. Wipe clean. Always test a hidden area first to be sure that the floor covering is colorfast.

Use vinegar to help eliminate cooking odors. Boil a teaspoon of white vinegar mixed in a cup of water to eliminate unpleasant cooking odors. Or rub a little white vinegar on your fingers before and after slicing onions to quickly remove the onion odor.

Kitchen windows can also be cleaned with a solution of 2 Tablespoons of vinegar to 1 quart of water. Remove built-up dirt with a soft cloth, and then apply the vinegar/water solution. Rub dry with newspaper or cloth.

Baking soda as an all-purpose cleaner. Baking soda is a mild alkali. A good all-purpose cleaner for kitchen appliances can be prepared by mixing 2 Tablespoons of baking soda with 1 quart of warm water. Use this cleaner to clean inside the refrigerator, the microwave oven and other small appliances. Wipe with a clean, dry cloth. Soap will leave an odor, so do not use soap inside the refrigerator.

Use the baking soda/water cleaner to remove odor and stains from plastic containers. Pour a quantity of cleaner into a plastic container and swirl. Let stand if necessary to remove lingering stains and odors. Rinse with clear water and dry.

Use baking soda to scour the kitchen sink without scratching the surface. Sprinkle baking soda on a damp sponge and scrub gently. Use a sponge sprinkled with baking soda to gently remove coffee and tea stains from cups.

Place an open box of baking soda on the back shelf of the refrigerator to remove food odors. After 2 months, place a new box of baking soda in the refrigerator, and dispose of the old box by pouring it down the drain in the kitchen sink to keep things smelling sweet.

Baked-on food can often be removed from pots and pans using baking soda. Sprinkle the food with baking soda, add a few cups of water to the pot and simmer for several minutes. Usually the burned-on food will lift right off the pan surface.

Borax can be a handy kitchen-cleaning product. Prepare an all-purpose cleaner by mixing 1 teaspoon borax into 4 cups of hot water. Add a squeeze of lemon juice or a splash of vinegar to cut grease. Use to wipe kitchen surfaces. Dry with a soft cloth.

For toilets, make a paste of 1/3 cup lemon juice and 2/3 cups borax, spread on stains, let sit two hours, then brush off.

Use bleach to sanitize your kitchen. Bleach can be used in your kitchen not as a cleaning product, but as a sanitizer. Use bleach on surfaces that have first been washed and rinsed to remove dirt. As a sanitizer, bleach will kill bacteria that may remain on a countertop, cutting board, or sink. Mix a dilute bleach solution using 1 teaspoon of bleach added to 1 quart of water. This solution can be stored in a spray bottle and used to sanitize countertops and cutting boards. Refresh a bleach sanitizing solution once a week. If you use the newer 'ultra' bleach, use just ¾ teaspoon per quart of water.

While vinegar and baking soda can be effective in cleaning a kitchen on a budget, research has shown that they are not as effective at disinfecting or sanitizing surfaces.

Carefully label all products. Be sure to carefully label all cleaning compounds or sanitizers that you prepare. Keep all chemicals out of reach of children. And remember that homemade cleaning products may require a bit more 'elbow grease' to be effective, but the result can be a kitchen cleaned to a sparkling shine on a budget.

What's On Your Mind?

Alice Henneman of the University of Nebraska has compiled a web-based list of contact information for many kitchen and housewares companies. Helpful cooking hints and resources online! The Internet has made it easy to contact kitchen and housewares companies for more information about using their products. While you used

to have to write a company, an answer is now often just a click or a call away. For an A-Z listing, check out the University of Nebraska's web site:

<http://lanaster.unl.edu/food/ciq-housewares.shtml>

And to make your search as easy as possible, consider these tips:

- Most major kitchen and housewares companies feature a "contact us" section on their Web site, where they offer a phone number and/or e-mail information.
- Before contacting the company, check if there is a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section. If a company offers several products, you may need to zero in on one product line on the Web site to find the information for that product.
- Remember that some companies are part of a larger organization. If you are having trouble contacting the smaller unit, consider a phone call or email to the parent company instead.

Happy searching!

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