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Food Facts For You!

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Summertime Food Safety; Gardening with Food Safety in Mind; Time to Get Ready for the Food Preservation Season; Spotlight on Bisphenol A; Food Storage Guidelines; Start at the Store: 7 Ways to Prevent Foodborne Illness.

Summertime Food Safety

Summertime is a time for picnics and grilling out. The USDA offers these tips on summertime food safety:

Before You Begin

- **Food safety begins with hand-washing**, at home and out-of-doors. Outdoors it can be as simple as using a water jug, some soap, and paper towels. In a pinch, consider packing moist disposable towelettes or gel hand sanitizer for your picnic so children and adults can 'clean' hands before eating.
- **Keep all utensils and surfaces clean** when preparing food.
- **Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables** under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Do not use soap! Rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running tap water or scrub with a clean vegetable brush while rinsing with running tap water. Rinse delicate berries just before use. Packaged fruits and vegetables labeled "ready-to-eat," "washed," or "triple washed" do not need to be washed. Dry fruits and vegetables with a clean cloth towel or paper towel to prevent decay.
- **There is no need to rinse meat or poultry** and it is not effective at removing germs.



When You Transport Food

- **Keep cold food cold.** Place cold food in a cooler or ice chest with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be held at or below 40°F. Limit the times the cooler is opened. Consider packing beverages in one cooler and perishable food in another.
- **Meat, poultry, and seafood may be packed while it is still frozen** so that it stays colder longer.
- **Wrap raw meat, poultry, and seafood securely** so their juices don't contaminate cooked foods or foods eaten raw such as fruits and vegetables.

Safe Grilling Tips

- **Marinate foods in the refrigerator**, not on the counter or outdoors. If some of the marinade is to be used as a basting sauce while cooking, either reserve a portion separately before adding the raw meat, poultry, or seafood, or boil the marinade for 1 minute before using it as a basting sauce. Never reuse marinade.
- **Don't use the same platter and utensils** that previously held raw meat or seafood to serve cooked meats and seafood without washing them first.
- **If you partially cook food to reduce grilling time**, do so immediately before the food goes on the hot grill.
- **When it's time to cook food, cook it thoroughly.** Use a food thermometer to be sure food reaches a safe internal temperature, and to avoid over-cooking.



- Beef, veal, and lamb – steaks and roasts - 145°F.
- Beef, veal and lamb – ground - 160°F.
- Pork – roasts or ground – 160°F.
- Poultry – whole, pieces, or ground - 165°F.
- Fish - 145°F or until the flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork.
- **Grilled food can be kept hot** until it is served by moving it to the side of the grill rack, just away from the coals where it can overcook.

When You Serve Food

- **Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.** Hot food should be kept hot, at or above 140°F. Wrap well and place in an insulated container. Foods served cold like chicken salad and desserts in individual serving dishes can be placed directly on ice, or in a shallow container set in a deep pan filled with ice. Drain off water as ice melts and replace ice frequently.
- **Don't let perishable food sit out longer than 2 hours.** Food should not sit out for more than **1 hour** in temperatures above 90°F.
- **Bring plenty of ice for transporting leftovers home!** Never put leftovers or ready-to-eat foods on ice that held raw meat or poultry.
- **Take extra care with melons.** Cut watermelon, cantaloupe, or honeydew should be handled carefully and never left unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours (1 hour on a hot day).

A **Safe Grilling** flyer can be found here: http://www.befoodsafe.org/BeFoodSafe_Grill_flyer.pdf

Spanish-language resources can be found here:

Thermy – It's safe to bite when the temperature is right.	http://www.fsis.usda.gov/En_Espanol/Programas_de_Difusion_Thermy/index.asp
Is It Done Yet?	http://www.fsis.usda.gov/en_espanol/Folleto_Esta_Listo_Ya/index.asp

Gardening with Food Safety in Mind

The summer growing season is beginning. Whether you have plans to plant the entire back yard or just a few tomato plants in containers, it's important to consider the safety of food when you garden. A project led by the University of Rhode Island last year surveyed home gardeners to determine their food safety knowledge. Using the results as a guide, a 5-step **Garden to Table program** was developed to help home gardeners keep food safe.



Step 1 - Prepare the Garden for Planting

- **Locate your vegetable garden** away from manure piles, well caps, garbage cans, septic systems and areas where wildlife, farm animals or the family pet roam.
- **Use compost safely.** To be safe for gardening, your compost must reach a temperature of at least 130 degrees F. Check the temperature with a compost thermometer. Don't use animal waste, including pet waste, meat scraps or dairy product waste in your compost bin.
- **If you use fresh manure** as a garden fertilizer, you should wait at least 120-days after application of the manure before harvesting any fruits or vegetables from your garden.

Step 2 - Maintain the Garden

- **Be familiar with the quality and safety of the water source you use in your garden.** If you get your water from a municipal or public water system, you can be sure it's safe and drinkable. If you use well water, be sure to test your water at least once a year to make sure

it meets the Environmental Protection Agency standards. As a general rule, surface water from rivers or streams should not be used. Collected rain water is safe for gardens.

- **During the gardening season**, keep cats, dogs and other pets out of the garden.
- **Curtail nesting and hiding places for rats and mice** by minimizing vegetation at the edges of your garden.
- **Don't feed wild animals**, even birds, near your garden.

Step 3 - Harvest Garden Produce

- **Use clean, food-grade containers.** Food-grade containers are made from materials designed specifically to safely hold food. Garbage bags, trash cans and any containers that originally held chemicals such as household cleaners or pesticides aren't food-grade.
- **Use clean gloves** (that have not been used to stir compost or pull weeds) or clean hands when picking produce.
- **Brush, shake or rub off any excess garden soil** or debris before bringing produce into the kitchen.

Step 4 - Storing Garden Produce

- **If you choose to wash fruits and vegetables before storing**, be sure to dry them thoroughly with a clean paper towel. Be sure to wash berries immediately before eating or cooking.
- **If you choose to store without washing**, shake, rub or brush off any garden soil with a paper towel or soft brush while still outside. Store unwashed produce in plastic bags or containers.
- **Keep fruit and vegetable bins in your refrigerator clean.**
- **When washing produce fresh from the garden**, the rinse water should not be more than 10 degrees colder than the produce. If you are washing refrigerated produce, use cold water.
- **Fruits and vegetables** needing refrigeration can be stored at 40 degrees F. or less. Fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature (onions, potatoes) should be in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from household chemicals.

Step 5 - Preparing and Serving Fresh Garden Produce

Delicious garden produce is often eaten raw so it's important to prepare raw fruits and vegetables with food safety in mind.

- **Always wash** your hands before handling raw fruits and vegetables.
- **Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables** under cool, running, clean water even if you don't eat the skin or rind.
- **Never use soap**, detergent, or bleach solution to wash fruits and vegetables. These products can affect flavor and may not be safe to ingest.
- **Avoid cross-contamination** when preparing fruits and vegetables. Clean work surfaces, utensils, and hands before and after handling fruits and vegetables.
- **If you have leftover produce** that has been cut, sliced, or cooked, store it in a clean, airtight container in the refrigerator at 40 degrees F. or less.

And what if you choose to shop at a Farm Market instead? The University of Nebraska has prepared a resource **Safety and Selection at the Farmers' Market** <http://lancaster.unl.edu/food/farmar.shtml>. Other resources on safety of garden produce (including resources in Spanish) can be found here: <http://www.foodsafety.wisc.edu/gardening.html>

Time to Get Ready for the Food Preservation Season

It isn't a race, but that doesn't keep the adrenaline from flowing as our offices gear up for those summertime food preservation questions. To help you prepare for this summer's onslaught of questions, here are some hints and reminders.

Time now to calibrate pressure canner testers! Dial gauge pressure canners should be checked every year to ensure that they are reading correctly (weighted gauge canners do not have to be checked). **Presto Industries** offers a free calibration for your master gauge on any Presto gauge tester unit. To send in your master gauge for calibration, package the master gauge (most tester units will have the master gauge stored in a large plastic recipe box) and send with an accompanying letter to Presto:

CONSUMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT National Presto Industries, Inc. 3925 North Hastings Way Eau Claire, WI 54703-3703

Updated food preservation publications! A new, updated USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning is expected later this summer. In advance of that publication, I have updated the core publications in our Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation Series. The revised bulletins are expanded to include many more tested recipes and each publication now includes a state elevation map so that consumers can easily make adjustments for elevation when pressure canning or water bath canning. The revised publications include:

- Canning Salsa Safely (B3570)
- Tomatoes Tart and Tasty (B2605)
- Canning Meat, Wild Game, Poultry and Fish Safely (B3345)
- Homemade Pickles and Relishes (B2267)
- Canning Vegetables Safely (B1159)
- Freezing Fruits and Vegetables (B3278)
- Canning Fruits Safely (B0430)
- Making Jams, Jellies and Fruit Preserves (B2909)

Please update copies in your office! [Note: None of the existing recipes/publications contain unsafe recommendations and consumers can continue to use them. However, any food product entered in competition at the county fair should follow the new/revised recommendations effective summer 2009.]

Plan now to attend a Master Food Preserver training this summer. Some of our food preservation workshops scheduled for this summer are already full, others have space available. If you are responsible for answering questions related to home canning and food safety, please consider this training. Extension staff, educators, and consumers are welcome to attend. Please contact the location directly if you are interested in signing up. Space available:

- **June 30-July 2** Price County, Phillips, WI 715-339-2555
- **July 14-16** Rock County, Clinton, WI 608-757-5689
- **July 29-31** Adams County, Adams, WI 608-339-4237

Participants pay a fee to attend which covers the cost of all training materials. Attendance at all 3 days is required for certification.

Where to turn for questions on food preservation. Answering questions on food preservation topics can be fun, but it can also be challenging. There are several resources to be aware of that will help:

- **National Center for Home Food Preservation** www.uga.edu/nchfp (research tested recipes)
- **Food Safety and Health** http://www.foodsafety.wisc.edu/preservation_special_topics.html (link to Wisconsin publications, powerpoint teaching files, fact sheets, and recipes)

Spotlight on Bisphenol A

Many consumers are wondering about the safety of plastic containers and other products after reports that a chemical used to make baby bottles, water bottles and food containers is facing increasing scrutiny by health officials in Canada and the United States. The substance is bisphenol-a, or BPA, widely used in the making of the hard, clear and nearly unbreakable plastic called polycarbonate. Studies and tests show that trace amounts of BPA are leaching from polycarbonate containers into foods and liquids.

The chemical is used to manufacture some clear plastic baby bottles, food-storage containers, clear plastic pitchers used for filtered water, and refillable water bottles and it is almost universally used for the lining of soft-drink and food cans. BPA is not found in softer, more flexible plastics such as single-serving water bottles. The Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control say that they are studying the chemical.

The New York Times on April 22 ran a story on the potential harm from this chemical: *Hard Plastic is Raising Hard Questions*. And an article posted on the NY Times web site on April 24 noted, "The plastics and coatings made with BPA have many attractive properties. They are, among other things, particularly good at not absorbing flavors or changing the flavor of items stored in them. Polycarbonate looks and feels like glass but is light and difficult to break. As a result, about 6.6 billion pounds of BPA is produced worldwide each year. BPA's potential to disrupt the hormonal system, however, has increasingly made its use in plastics for food purposes controversial. Animal tests have raised questions about the safety of BPA, but the chemical industry says those findings have, in some cases, not been duplicated, and it disputes their relevance to human health. But in April 2008, the United States Department of Health and Human Services' National Toxicology Program issued a draft report citing "some concern for neural and behavioral effects in fetuses, infants, and children at current human exposures." The government of Canada has listed BPA as a toxic substance under its environmental protection act. Because of that listing, it has introduced regulations that will ban selling, advertising, manufacturing or importing baby bottles made with BPA-related plastics. It will also work with industry to minimize or eliminate BPA-based linings in cans used for infant formula. The Canadian review, however, found "negligible risk" from BPA to those older than 18 months. Despite that, most of Canada's largest retailers swiftly removed all food-related BPA products from their shelves. No significant studies have suggested that other, widespread uses of BPA, which include everything from sunglasses to computer cases, pose any health risk. "

To date, the FDA and the CDC have not issued any consumer recommendations regarding this chemical. However, a report by the CDC indicates that BPA is widespread, even in the human body. Results published in 2007 from urine samples from 2,517 people aged 6 years and older showed:

- BPA was detected in urine of nearly 93% of people tested
- Females had significantly higher levels of BPA in their urine than males. Children had the highest levels, followed by teens and adults.
- Non-Hispanic blacks and non-Hispanic whites had higher levels of BPA than Mexican Americans.

- People with the lowest household incomes had higher levels of BPA than people in the highest income bracket.

How much BPA are we exposed to?

BPA migrates into food from polycarbonate plastic bottles or the epoxy resin coatings that line canned food. The typical adult ingests an estimated 1 microgram of BPA for every kilogram (2.2 pounds) of body weight. Babies who use polycarbonate bottles and formula from cans get more, an estimated 10 micrograms per kilogram of body weight. A microgram represents a trace amount. The CDC survey results that exposure to BPA is ubiquitous.

How do I know if the plastic containers in my home contain BPA?

Any product made of hard, clear plastic is probably made from polycarbonate unless the manufacturer specifically states that it's BPA-free. One way to check is to look for the triangle stamp on or near the bottom: polycarbonate plastics should have the numeral 7 in the triangle, sometimes with the letters PC. Unfortunately, 7 is a catchall "other" category for a variety of plastics. In my own kitchen, I found just one product with a 7 plastic fruit cups my daughter takes to school. But the plastic is soft and pliable, so it is probably not made with BPA. I also found refillable water bottles without a stamp. Because they are hard, shatterproof and clear, it's reasonable to assume they are made from polycarbonate.

What about canned food and drinks?

While much of the focus is on plastic bottles, most human exposure occurs through the lining of canned foods. Canned beverages appear to contain less of the chemical than canned foods like soup, pasta, fruits and vegetables, which are often processed at high temperatures. Virtually every canned product, even those labeled organic, has a liner with BPA. One brand, Eden Organic Baked Beans, says it uses a BPA-free can.

How do I lower my exposure?

Switch to frozen or fresh vegetables. Use glass, porcelain and stainless-steel containers, particularly for hot foods and liquids. If you don't want to use a glass baby bottle, several companies, including the popular brand Born Free, now sell BPA-free baby bottles and sippy cups. For formula-fed babies, you can switch to powdered formula rather than liquid. Although many plastic products claim to be microwave safe, some scientists warn against putting any plastic in the microwave.

To learn more. Some of the strongest investigative reporting has been published by the **Milwaukee Journal Sentinel**: www.jsonline.com/chemicalfallout and this work was turned into the subject of **Bill Moyer's Journal** broadcast on Friday, May 23, 2008. **Expose: Chemicals in our Food (23:45)**. http://blip.tv/file/944560?utm_source=aolvideo&utm_medium=aolvideo If you can devote 25 minutes to the issue, the online Moyer's special is worth watching. While there are no answers to this issue (yet), the Milwaukee articles and the Moyer's report indicate that it may be worthwhile for consumers to consider their options.

Start at the Store: 7 Ways to Prevent Foodborne Illness

Safeguarding your home against foodborne illnesses begins not at home, but at the supermarket, grocery store, or any other place where you buy food that you plan to store and serve. Combating foodborne illnesses is a top priority at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). That's because, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), foodborne ailments cause about 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,200 deaths nationwide each year. Here are tips for consumers in preventing foodborne illness, starting at the store.

You as a consumer can play a key role in preventing these illnesses. While shopping for food, you should:

- 1. Check for cleanliness.** Buying from a retailer who follows proper food handling practices helps assure that the food is safe. Ask yourself: What is the general impression of this facility? Does it look and smell clean?
- 2. Keep certain foods separated.** Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart. Place these foods in plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping on other foods. It is also best to separate these foods from other foods at checkout and in your grocery bags.
- 3. Inspect cans and jars.** Don't buy food in cans that are bulging or dented. Also, don't buy food in jars that are cracked or have loose or bulging lids. Since foods sold in cans or jars are processed to be sterile, they can "keep" for a long time if the can or jar is intact. A bulging can or jar lid may mean the food was under-processed and is contaminated. A dent in a can, especially if the dent affects a seam, may cause an opening in the seam which may allow contamination, as would a crack in a jar. A loose lid on a jar means the vacuum has been lost and the product may be contaminated. Don't buy a food product whose seal seems tampered with or damaged.
- 4. Inspect frozen food packaging.** Don't buy frozen food if the package is damaged. Packages should not be open, torn or crushed on the edges. Also, avoid packages that are above the frost line in the store's freezer. If the package cover is transparent, look for signs of frost or ice crystals. This could mean that the food in the package has either been stored for a long time or thawed and refrozen. In such cases, choose another package.
- 5. Select frozen foods and perishables last.** Meat, poultry, fish and eggs should be the last items placed in your shopping cart. Always put these products in separate plastic bags so that drippings don't contaminate other foods.
- 6. Choose fresh eggs carefully.** Before putting eggs in your cart, open the carton and make sure that the eggs are clean and none is cracked. Buy only refrigerated eggs and follow the "Safe Handling Instructions" on the carton.
- 7. Be mindful of time and temperature.** It's important to refrigerate perishable products as soon as possible after grocery shopping. Food safety experts stress the "2-hour rule"—because harmful bacteria can multiply in the "danger zone" (between 40° and 140° F), perishable foods should not be left at room temperature longer than 2 hours. Modify that rule to 1 hour when temperatures are above 90° F, as they often are in cars that have been parked in the sun. If it will take more than an hour to get your groceries home, use an ice chest to keep frozen and perishable foods cold. Also, when the weather is warm and you are using your car's air conditioner, keep your groceries in the passenger compartment, not the trunk.

You can find a copy of this fact sheet at: www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/foodillness051308.html