

Q - We are excited to try our new gas grill and now the weather is nice enough to get started. I don't have much experience grilling foods outdoors. What are some tips to keep in mind?

A - It's the time of year to start cooking and serving some meals out of doors. We want to relax and enjoy the warm weather. But the warm weather means a higher risk of food borne illness. Use the following information to help you keep your food safe.

Note that there are some common **Barbecue Blunders** that you need to avoid:

- Do NOT use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meats and poultry. Instead, use a different platter OR wash the platter and utensils in hot soapy water and air dry.
- DO wash your hands after handling raw meat or poultry.
- DO NOT marinating meats, poultry or seafood at room temperature. INSTEAD, marinate items in the refrigerator.
- DO NOT reuse a marinade that was used on raw meat for cooked meats without boiling it first.
- DO NOT leave foods that need to be kept hot or cold out at room temperature for more than two hours. INSTEAD, keep food below 40F or above 140F.
- DO NOT add or mix fresh food, like dip or potato salad, to food that has been sitting out. INSTEAD, use smaller serving dishes and rotate or replace the dish often.
- AVOID barbecuing meat or poultry that has not completely thawed because the food may get charred on the outside and undercooked on the inside.

**Safe Grilling.** When grilling, remember these five tips for safety:

Place the grill on a flat, level surface, away from overhangs, fences, decks and shrubs that could ignite by a sudden flare-up or flying spark.

Position the grill in a well-ventilated area. NEVER barbecue indoors--toxic, odorless fumes (carbon monoxide) can build up.

Never use gasoline or kerosene to light a charcoal fire. They can cause an explosion.

Remember, coals get HOT--up to 1,000F. Use insulated, flame-retardant mitts and long-handled barbecue tongs and utensils.

Always place cooked foods on a clean plate, not one that has previously held raw meat, fish or poultry. Bacteria from the raw food can contaminate the cooked food.

**Grill Healthy.** Grilling is a wonderful option for those who are watching their fat and sodium intake. Grilled foods require no additional fat for cooking and because they taste so good, require minimal seasoning. As with all cooking, avoid overly high heat and charring. Try these five tips:

Trim all visible fat from meats before grilling.

Use oil-free, fruit-juice-based marinades or fruit salsas to add flavor.

To boost the charcoal-grilled flavor add fresh herbs, herbal tea bags, fresh citrus peel or wood chips to the coals. Soak these for 10 minutes before adding to the fire. Add more each 15 minutes.

Instead of fattening desserts, grill fresh fruits, such as pineapples and bananas. Serve with nonfat vanilla yogurt or nonfat sour cream.

Grill vegetables for healthy side dishes. To manage the cooking, thread vegetables pieces on bamboo skewers that have been soaked in water for 10 minutes to prevent burning.

Enjoy your new grill while keeping food safe.