Grilling safety and nutrition reminders

Source: Annhall Norris, extension specialist

The scent of charcoal and delicious meats and marinades cooking on the grill are sure signs of summertime. As we spend more time cooking outdoors, it is important that we also remember food safety and nutrition.

Food safety ensures that food is prepared and cooked in a way that kills harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Many grilling food safety practices are the same as with indoor food preparation.

Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before and after handling all food. Do not cross-contaminate raw and cooked foods. Wash cutting boards, utensils and dishes before preparing each new item and always use a clean platter when removing foods from the grill.

Safely defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator, microwave or in cold water. Never thaw food at room temperature. If your recipe requires you to marinate your food, do so in the refrigerator. Make enough marinade to divide between raw meats and the sauce. Do not reuse marinade that was placed on raw meats as a sauce on cooked foods. Juices from raw meats can contaminate cooked food.

When grilling, use a meat thermometer to make sure the meat is cooked to a high enough temperature to kill any bacteria. Cook ground meats, including beef, pork, lamb and veal, to an internal temperature of 160 degrees F. Other cuts of these meats, including steaks, roasts and chops, need to reach 145 degrees F after a 3-minute rest period. Grill all chicken and poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees F. Without using a meat thermometer, you may be tricked into thinking a meat is cooked before it actually reaches a safe temperature, because the outside of meat browns quickly on the grill. All grilled meats need to maintain a temperature of 140 degrees F before serving. Accomplish this by keeping meat on the side of the grill away from direct heat or placing it in an oven warmed to 200 degrees F.

While meats are the first foods that often come to mind when we talk about grilling, they are not the only foods that are tasty when cooked on the grill. You can grill a lot of fruits and vegetables. Peaches, pears, pineapples, bananas, apples and melons grill well. Select firm fruit that is not too ripe. Over-ripe fruit can end up too soft when grilled. You can enhance their flavor by applying olive oil or lemon juice before placing them on the grill.

Place firm vegetables like corn on the cob, asparagus and eggplant directly on your grill’s cooking grid. Brush with olive oil and season with fresh herbs. Frequently turn vegetables to keep them from burning. Wrap smaller or chopped vegetables, along with a little oil and seasoning, in aluminum foil before grilling.

Cooked food should not set outside for more than two hours. If it is warmer than 90 degrees F, then food should not set out for more than one hour.

More information about nutrition and food safety is available at the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

-30-