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Agriculture & Natural Resources



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Solving Those Thanksgiving Food Dilemmas

Thanksgiving is a time for family and friends to get together and celebrate over food. Sometimes this is easier said than done. Here are some common Thanksgiving dilemmas and the suggested solutions:

“Not everyone can come and eat at the same time—what do I do?”

One solution is to make your hot dishes in crock pots. A little searching on the Internet using the key words “holiday” or “Thanksgiving” and “crock pot” will guide you to numerous recipes—everything from appetizers to desserts. Leave your cold foods in the refrigerator and bring them out in smaller amounts as needed. Remember the two hour rule: foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard anything there two hours or more. Keep hot foods hot (140°F or above) and cold foods cold (40°F or lower).

"What do I do with hot take out food? I am picking up a hot, cooked turkey dinner at a restaurant."

If you eat within two hours, handle the hot food as follows: Pick up the food HOT...and keep it HOT. Keeping foods warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria multiply fastest between 40° and 140 °F. Set the oven temperature high enough to keep the internal temperature of the turkey and all side dishes at 140 °F or above. Use a food thermometer to check food temperatures. Covering the food will help keep it moist.

If you're not eating within 2 hours, remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity and refrigerate in shallow containers. Reheating a whole turkey is not recommended. Cut turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole. Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables in shallow containers. Reheat turkey pieces and all side dishes thoroughly to 165 °F, until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil. If using a microwave oven then cover food and rotate dish so it heats evenly. Follow the microwave oven manufacturer's instructions.

"I just discovered I cooked the turkey with the package of giblets still inside the cavity. Are the turkey and giblets safe to eat?"

If giblets were left in the cavity during roasting, even though this is not recommended, the turkey and giblets are probably safe to use. However, if the packaging material containing the giblets has changed shape or melted in any way during cooking, *do not use* the giblets or the turkey because harmful chemicals from the packaging may have penetrated the surrounding meat.

"We had a family argument at Thanksgiving dinner last year. My Aunt wouldn't eat the turkey because the cooked meat looked pink. Is pink turkey meat safe?"

The color of cooked meat and poultry is not always a sure sign of its degree of doneness. Only by using a food thermometer can one accurately determine that meat has reached a safe temperature. Turkey, fresh pork, ground beef or veal can remain pink even after cooking to temperatures of 160 °F and higher. The meat of smoked turkey is always pink.

Have a safe and happy Thanksgiving!

Source: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/NR_110804_01/index.asp retrieved Oct. 16, 2006

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