

Make the Most of Your Meat

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Stock-up sales on meat and poultry really help stretch the food budget. However, many organisms can infect meat products, and safe food handling and preservation techniques will insure that the food remains a good buy. When handling meats, be sure to keep the food cooled below 40°F at all times. Meat will begin to spoil above 40°F, and dangerous bacteria grow rapidly in foods at room temperature.

Be sure also, when preparing meats, to take safe precautions to keep all the utensils used clean and sanitary. Clean all tools before and after using. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly sanitize all work surfaces. A simple solution of 1½ teaspoons of bleach to 1 quart of water can be used on cutting boards and most knives and meat preparation equipment.

One method of storage for fresh meat or poultry is freezing. Clean the meat and re-package in a freezer safe container. Leave whole or cut into individual serving sizes. Use butcher or freezer paper to wrap meats. Zip-type freezer bags with most of the air removed also work well. Be sure to keep the freezer set at 0°F.

Other methods of preserving meat and poultry include drying, canning, salting and curing. The UC Cooperative Extension El Dorado County Master Food Preservers offer free public classes on Meat Preserving on September 14 and September 18, 2010. Safe preservation methods help ensure safe meals.

But what will you do with so many servings of meat? How many boneless, skinless chicken breasts can your family eat? The MFP will share recipes and techniques for making jerky, canning meat products and making your own sausages. Homemade meat products can be delicious. Learn how to choose the proper casings for sausages and how to dry cooked meats for camping and backpacking trips.

A favorite of many, beef jerky, can be made with your own special formula for a marinade. Pick a cut of beef that lends itself to jerky. Cool beef to almost freezing; this will make it easier to slice. Slice beef ¼" to ½" thick, 1" to 1 ½" wide, and 4" to 12" long. Cut meat with the grain and remove the fat. (If the jerky is too fatty it will turn rancid.) Marinate the beef in your favorite marinade overnight in the refrigerator. Cook beef to 160°F internal temperature. The meat may be cooked in the marinade. Cool and blot dry with clean paper towels. Place beef on racks in dehydrator or hang in a smoker. Allow strips to touch but not to overlap. Set the dehydrator temperature or regulate the smoker to 140°F. Let the strips dry/smoke for 11 hours. Check for excessive dripping that will cause fire flair ups. In a dehydrator, place aluminum foil on the next rack down to catch the drips. (This recipe is one of many you'll find in El Dorado County Master Food Preservers Publications.)

Take advantage of supermarket sales to make the most of your money, and take advantage of the free public classes to make the most of your great buys. The Master Food Preservers are trained by the University of California Cooperative Extension. The classes are held from 10 a.m. to noon in the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.