Grilling Outdoors Safely
Grilling Outdoors - Safely

Spring and summer seasons bring out the backyard chef in all of us. However, cooking out requires an extra measure of care to prevent foodborne illness. Grilling carefully also can prevent excessive smoke and charring that may be unhealthy. To keep your cookouts both safe and fun, follow these simple tips about proper food preparation and grilling.

Food Preparation
- Select high quality fresh meat, poultry or seafood products for the best results in outdoor grilling.
- Maintain meat products at 40°F or less (recommended refrigeration temperatures) until immediately before grilling. Thaw frozen meat products in the refrigerator for best results. Do not thaw meat at room temperature. The outer layers of meat may reach a temperature that promotes bacterial growth before the inner layers are thawed.
- Keep marinating foods in the refrigerator. Do not use leftover marinade as a sauce on cooked meat. Marinade may contain bacteria from raw meat that could contaminate cooked meat.
- Always wash your hands before and after working with raw meat or poultry. Handle raw foods and cooked foods separately.
- Wash work surfaces and cutting boards thoroughly with hot, soapy water before and after preparing meat for grilling. To sanitize, clean with a solution of 1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons of bleach per quart of water. Use a different cutting board for meats than for raw fruits and vegetables.
- After you place the meat on the grill, wash utensils and platters with hot, soapy water before using them again to serve the meat. Cooking kills bacteria, but cooked foods can be recontaminated with unwashed utensils.
- Keep serving time after cooking to a maximum of 2 hours and refrigerate all leftovers immediately at 40°F or below.
- Chicken, pork, turkey and ground meat products should be cooked until the juice runs clear or the temperature reaches 170°F.
- Steaks and ground meats cooked rare and medium rare pose no health risk for most healthy people. But they may represent increased risk for persons who have been ill, are recovering from surgery or have compromised immune systems. Cook meat thoroughly if you wish to kill all bacteria.

Grilling
These additional suggestions will keep your food from becoming too heavily smoked or charred. That also means less smoke in your eyes!

- Smoke and flare-ups are caused by dripping fat. For this reason, choose meats for cookouts that are low in fat. Trim excess fat from the meat before grilling.
- Avoid marinades or basting sauces that contain a lot of fat.
- Cover the grill with aluminum foil. Punch holes between the grids to let juice drip out.
- If dripping fat causes heavy smoke, move the food to another section of the grill, rotate the grill or reduce the heat.
- Learn to control the fire. Cook meat until it is done but without charring it. Remove any charred or burned material that forms on the food's surface. Do not eat it.
- Some foods, especially fish and vegetables, can be wrapped in foil to protect them from smoke while grilling.
- If you want to reduce grilling time, you can pre-cook many foods, including poultry and ribs, by boiling or cooking in the microwave and then grilling briefly to add cookout flavor. However, immediately place pre-cooked foods on the grill and complete cooking. Partially cooked foods may develop bacterial growth that causes food-borne illness. Cookouts are an ever popular family and social activity. Keep them consistently safe by following common sense rules of cleanliness, food safety and healthful cooking.

The information in this leaflet was provided by Dr. James Denton, Associate Department Head and Extension Program Leader for Poultry Science; Dr. Dan Hale, Extension Meats Specialist; and Dr. Peggy Gentry-Van Laanen, Extension nutrition specialist; The Texas A&M University System.
Chicken Fajitas

1 tablespoon oil or liquid margarine
1 chicken breast or thigh filet
½ bell pepper, cut in julienne strips
½ onion, cut in julienne strips
fajita seasoning (dry mix in shaker bottle)

Sprinkle fajita seasoning liberally on both sides of breast or thigh filet. Allow chicken to marinate while slicing vegetables. To prepare fajitas in the kitchen, heat 1 tablespoon oil or liquid margarine in skillet or saute pan and add chicken filet and cook using medium-high heat. For outside grilling, place chicken over white-hot coals. For both cooking methods, allow approximately 4 minutes per side for chicken to cook. The key is to cook as rapidly as possible to retain the moist and juicy nature of the chicken filet. The chicken is completely done when the meat is white throughout the filet.

A couple minutes before the chicken is done, place vegetables in a skillet over the grill. Add oil and saute the onions and peppers until they are tender-crisp and not overcooked. Pour sautéed onions and peppers onto platter. Remove cooked chicken and cut into strips about 1/4 inch by 2 inches. Although cooking the chicken filet before cutting into strips results in a more tender and juicy product, cutting into strips before cooking will shorten the cooking time if desired.

Serve on heated flour tortillas with guacamole, sour cream and pico de gallo.

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