Keep Your Picnics and Barbeques Food Safe this Summer

Many families enjoy picnics and barbeques during the summer. It’s a great way to reconnect with family and friends, enjoy time outdoors and play a game of softball or kickball together. Here are some tips to keep your food safe and to keep your friends and family healthy and well:

1. Keep cold foods cold. Cold foods should be stored at 40 degrees or colder. Make sure to pack your cooler with lots of ice or ice packs. Only take food out of the cooler long enough to serve it, then put it back into the cooler for safe keeping. Store coolers in the shade to help keep food cool.

2. Keep hot food hot. If you are serving hot foods at your gathering, consider using a crockpot to keep hot foods hot. Hot foods should be held at 140 degrees or hotter to stay safe.

3. Use two plates when grilling meats, poultry and seafood. One plate to carry the raw food to the grill and a second clean plate to serve the cooked food.

4. Use an instant read thermometer to make sure grilled food is completely cooked. Cook steaks to 145 degrees, poultry, hot dogs and sausage to 165 degrees, ground meat to 160 degrees and fish and seafood to 145 degrees.

5. If you don’t have access to water and soap to wash your hands and clean surfaces when you are handling or serving food, make sure to bring disinfecting wipes to use.

What’s In Season:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Green and Yellow Beans</th>
<th>Cucumbers</th>
<th>Radishes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beets</td>
<td>Eggplant</td>
<td>Swiss Chard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>Lettuce</td>
<td>Winter and Summer Squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabbage</td>
<td>Leeks</td>
<td>Apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Mustard Greens</td>
<td>Blueberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Cantaloupes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celery</td>
<td>Peppers</td>
<td>Peaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collard Greens</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Pears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>Plums</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Green, red, yellow and orange bell peppers are abundant this month at farmers’ markets and farm stands. Bell peppers are easy to freeze and perfect to use during the winter in any cooked dish. Bell peppers are an incredible bargain in the summer compared to $4 per pound or more during the winter months.

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation website (nchfp.uga.edu) it is easy to freeze bell peppers.

1. Prepare peppers by selecting crisp, blemish free peppers. Wash, cut out stems, cut in half and remove seeds. Cut into strips, rings or pieces.

2. Package raw in freezer zip top bags or freezer containers, leaving no headspace. Remove air (if using zip top bags), seal and freeze!

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**Try Eggplant this Month**

Eggplant is one of those vegetables you either grew up eating or that you have no idea what it tastes like or how to use it in a recipe. Eggplant is commonly found in Asian, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern food. The most common eggplant is dark purple but you can also find white, striped, mini and slender shaped eggplant too. Eggplant is naturally low in calories, fat and sodium and is a good source of fiber. It can be eaten grilled, baked, broiled, fried, sautéed, stewed or roasted but is not good eaten raw.

Choose an eggplant that is bright in color with no blemishes and that is not shriveled or flabby. Store your unwashed eggplant in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. Wash the eggplant just before using it. Cut off the cap and stem. Eggplant can be cooked with or without the skin. You can use chopped eggplant as a meat extender in dishes, sliced and grilled then used in sandwiches, baked and the flesh scooped and made into a dip, sautéed with other summer vegetables to make a stew called ratatouille or stuffed with other vegetables and/or meat and baked.
Easy Eggplant Parmesan

**Ingredients:**
- 3 cups spaghetti sauce
- 1 medium eggplant (about 1 1/2 to 2 pounds)
- 6 ounces part skim mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

**Directions:**
1. Spray a 9- x 13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
2. Pour 1/2 cup of spaghetti sauce in pan. Peel eggplant and slice into 1/2-inch thick slices. Put half of the slices in the baking dish. Top with 1 cup of sauce, half of the mozzarella cheese, and the remainder of the eggplant. Cover with the rest of the sauce and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.
3. Cover with foil and bake for 45 minutes in a 350°F oven. Remove foil, sprinkle the rest of the mozzarella cheese on top and return to the oven to bake, without foil, until the cheese is melted.
4. Serve with a fresh green salad and a serving of cooked pasta.

**Nutrition Facts:** 277 calories, 62 calories from fat, 7g total fat, 45g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 20mg cholesterol, 420mg sodium, 29g total carbohydrate, 5g dietary fiber, 6g sugar, 12g protein, 9% vitamin A, 27% calcium, 11% vitamin C, 9% Iron.

**Source:** University of Maine Cooperative Extension, bulletin #4307 - eggplant

Beet Salad with Mustard Dressing

**Ingredients:**
- Salad: 4 medium beets, unpeeled, greens removed
- Salad Dressing:
  - 2 tablespoons lemon juice
  - 2 tablespoons prepared mustard
  - 1 tablespoon vinegar
  - 1 tablespoon oil
  - 1 teaspoon sugar
  - 2 teaspoons dried dill weed
  - Black pepper to taste

**Directions:**
1. Cook the beets in enough water to cover until they are just tender (about 1 hour), peel them, and slice them crosswise. Or, try slicing them and cooking in a little water, covered, in a microwave safe dish, for about 10 minutes.
2. Combine mustard, vinegar, oil, sugar, dill and black pepper in a medium bowl.
3. Add the beets to the bowl and stir them gently to coat them with the dressing.
4. Refrigerate for 1 hour before serving.

**Nutrition Facts:** Serving Size: ¼ recipe, 77 calories, 35 calories from fat, 4g total fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 149mg sodium, 10g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber, 7g sugar, 2g protein, 1% vitamin A, 2% calcium, 13% vitamin C, 4% Iron.

**Source:** University of Maine Cooperative Extension - Food and Health
Enjoy some together time with your child and make this special breakfast treat this month.

**Black Beans with Corn and Tomatoes**

**Ingredients:**
1 (15 ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 cup tomatoes, fresh or canned, diced
1 cup corn, fresh, canned or frozen and thawed
1 garlic clove, minced
1 teaspoon parsley, chopped
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper or more to taste

**Directions:**
1. In a medium bowl, combine beans, tomatoes, corn, and garlic.
2. Add parsley, chili powder, and cayenne pepper. Mix well.

**Nutrition Facts:** 110 calories, 9 calories from fat, 1g total fat, 220mg sodium, 25g total carbohydrate, 7g dietary fiber, 3g sugar, 6g protein, 10% vitamin A, 20% vitamin C, 4% calcium, 10% iron.

**Source:** Quick and Healthy Recipes from Mississippi State University

**Breakfast Splits**

**Ingredients:**
1 banana
1/2 cup low fat yogurt
1/4 cup granola or flake type cereal
1/2 cup sliced or chopped fresh fruit (try blueberries, peaches, plums)

**Directions:**
1. Cut banana in half lengthwise and place in a shallow bowl.
2. Top banana with yogurt, cereal and fruit.

**Source:** Healthy and Homemade Calendar 2011, Iowa State University Extension