

## Grill smart: Food safety tips for outdoor cooking and barbecues

By Clark Snyder

There's nothing like the smell of smoky ribs, sizzling sausages and charred kebabs on a warm Montana evening. Whether you're flipping burgers in the backyard or firing up the smoker at a lakeside campout, barbecue season is a highlight of summer.

But here's the deal: Warm weather and outdoor cooking conditions can turn your cookout into a breeding ground for bacteria if you're not careful. Don't let foodborne illness crash your barbecue. Use these food safety tips to keep your outdoor barbecue safe from prep to plate.

**Prep to impress:** Buy smart, store smart. Begin by purchasing food items from an approved source and checking food product quality before purchase. Once home, refrigerate potentially hazardous foods such as raw meats, salads and cut fruits and keep them at 41°F or colder, don't leave them hanging out on the counter.

Hitting the campsite or park? Pack your potentially hazardous foods directly from the fridge or freezer into a fully loaded cooler with plenty of ice or frozen gel packs. Keep raw meat sealed tightly and separate from ready-to-eat foods to prevent leaks and cross-contamination.

**Clean hands, clean utensils:** Barbecue is about having a good time, but food safety is essential.

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before handling food.
- Thoroughly wash utensils, grill tongs, cutting boards and surfaces in between uses.
- Skip rinsing raw meats as potential splashing can contaminate other foods.

If watermelon or cantaloupe is part of your meal, wash the rinds before slicing. That stops bacteria from hitching a ride into the flesh when you cut.

**Keep it separated:** Grill time isn't the time to multitask with your cutting boards.

- Use separate utensils and cutting boards for raw meat and everything else, especially salads, fruits and vegetables that will not be cooked.
- Never reuse the plate that held raw meat unless it's been thoroughly washed.
- Discard any remaining used marinade. If you want to use some as sauce, bring it a boil to kill the bacteria or make extra and keep it separate from raw meat.

**Cook to kill:** Don't just eyeball those steaks, use a food thermometer to make sure your barbecue hits safe internal temperatures:

- 145°F – Steaks, pork chops and fish
- 155°F – Ground beef and pork sausages

- 165°F – All chicken

Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the meat to ensure meat is cooked to a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria.

**Chill what's left:** Once the grill cools down, it's time to cool your leftovers.

- If it's below 90°F outside, get leftovers into the cooler or fridge within 2 hours.
- If it's above 90°F outside, refrigerate your leftovers within 1 hour.

Summer in Montana flies by, so don't let a foodborne illness shorten your time to enjoy it. Follow these easy food safety tips to keep your barbecues safe, fun and full of good eats.

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