Now that there is a chill in the air, many families around the state are making plans for the holiday season. For many of those families, holiday meals are a big focus of the celebration. Families often have foods that are traditional for special occasions.

A special gathering of family and friends for a meal often means digging out the good dishes, adding festive decorations and, of course, preparing those special foods. Something else you need to keep in mind is food safety, said Barbara Brown, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension food specialist.

“Whether it’s in the shopping, preparation or storing of foods, safety must be your number one priority,” Brown said. “Be prepared for a variety of situations, including guests being delayed or your oven not working properly. If you’re prepared you’re less likely to face any food safety issues.”

When friends and family members are traveling to your home for the holidays, there is always the chance they will be delayed by illness, weather or car problems.

If meat or poultry has been thawed in the refrigerator, it can safely be refrozen if the meal must be postponed for several days.

Brown said there may be a possibility of decrease in the quality when frozen for a second time, but it would be safe because bacteria do not grow in the freezer.

“Poultry and ground meats can be refrigerated for two days. Red meats such as roasts and steaks will keep up to five days,” she said. “If you need to store meat for longer than that, you should freeze it until you’re ready to cook it.”

If some foods already have been cooked, such as casseroles, they can safely be stored for up to four days. For longer storage, freeze cooked meat or poultry entrees and casseroles.

To freeze cooked foods, arrange in shallow, air-tight containers for quicker freezing or wrap tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil and freeze.

“In the event your guests are delayed by just an hour or so, just keep basic food safety rules in mind. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold,” Brown said. “Don’t let any cooked foods, including meat and poultry; remain in the danger zone – between 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 140 degrees Fahrenheit – for more than two hours. If you have hot foods in the oven, you may be able to hold them safely until guests arrive.”

Use a meat thermometer to make sure your entrees remain at a safe temperature. Adjust the oven temperature so that food stays at an internal temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit or above.

To help keep meats and casseroles from drying out, keep foods covered with aluminum foil. If guests will be delayed by three or four hours, it is best to refrigerate the food and then simply reheat it when they arrive.

“Special family dinners during the holiday season are wonderful opportunities to create lasting memories and maintain a sense of togetherness. Keeping food safety in mind will help ensure the cook isn’t remembered for a less-than-pleasant dining experience,” she said.
Be Wise When Giving to Charities

With the holidays quickly approaching many people want to reach out to those in need, but before you give to any charitable organization make sure and give it careful consideration.

Before giving any donation to a charity it is important to recognize the legitimate charities from the fraudulent ones, said Glenn Muske, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service interim associate dean, assistant director, family and consumer sciences.

“For the most part, charitable organizations are honest and will put the money you give them to good use,” Muske said. “Before giving, you should make sure you are giving to a charity that has their heart in the right spot.”

The Better Business Bureau has developed four basic standards of accountability for charitable organizations. They include:

- Determine how they govern their organization
- See the ways they spend their money (including how much goes toward fundraising activities – suggesting no more than 35 percent of donations be used in that manner).
- The truthfulness of their representations.
- Willingness to disclose basic information to the public.

The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance (the Alliance) suggests to the public to give the same careful thought for their donated clothing, furniture and other good as they would for cash donations for charity. Thrift shops may vary in how their actual sales benefit charities.

“When donating clothing, most people think of it as a convenience gift to help clean out the house, but as a contributor it is important to take the time to see who will benefit from the donation,” Muske said. “The name of the store may identify the affiliation with the charity, but names that sound like charities have been sued by for-profit stores with little or no link to charity.”

The Alliance has tips for picking thrift stores and other guidance for informed giving.

The Alliance reports on nearly 500 national charities. This coverage comes close to holding 50 percent of the total revenue received annually by charitable organizations in the United States.

Muske said with charity reporting on this scale, it will assist more donors in making informed decisions when giving and assist more charities in setting up their commitment to moral practices and give greater confidence to those who are giving.

Tips for giving to charties and in-depth reports can be found online at www.give.org.

Five “Welcome to Our Home” Holiday Decorating Tips

Create an exciting and welcoming home for your Thanksgiving festivities.

For Your Home’s Exterior

1. Door wreaths welcome all to your home and set the stage for celebrating. Make a simple wreath to hang on your front door with Thanksgiving colors – brown, russet, olive green. Use tree branches from your garden; attach a few gourds, nuts, raffia, and ribbons.
2. Place a gorgeous mum by your front door. You can plant it later and get flowers next Thanksgiving to use inside. It just takes one bright spot near your front door to attract the eye of arriving guests.
3. Wrap your front door with gift wrap appropriate to Thanksgiving.
4. Make a “welcome to our home” banner.
5. Group vines, pumpkins, and mums for display impact near the front entrance. Adjust the vines to add height and movement.

Fall leaves make great interior and exterior decorations. Be sure to hose off any bugs!

For Your Home’s Interior

1. Display vegetables and mini-pumpkins on a tray. Fill in any gaps with fall leaves, moss, raffia, or wheat. If orange clash with your home’s interior, use green apples and spray paint the mini-pumpkins your colors.
2. Tie ribbons and raffia around your candle bases and around your floral arrangements.
3. Set fall-color leaves under your decorations. Safety Tip: Keep leaves separated from melting candle wax.
4. Extend your flower arrangements with fall tree branches. Just one flower package makes a huge impact when you divide and spread it around.
5. Use copper, bronze, and gold spray paint to dress up plain gourds. Fill a glass or crystal bowl with the gourds, oranges and nuts.

Did I already mention gorgeous red, golden leaves? Here’s another way to add fall color: Place the leaves in your green potted-plants.

One beautiful way to kick off the holiday season: Wrap tiny gifts in gold foil; top off with born and russet ribbons, and place the gifts on the dinner plate. Your table will look fabulous and your guest will love the though.
Thanksgiving on a Budget

The Pilgrims did it and so can we. Create a traditional Thanksgiving meal on a budget. Despite the passage of 384 years since the first Thanksgiving, which consisted of three days of prayer and feasting, some significant parts of the celebration remain the same.

The Pilgrims feast included many foods we eat at Thanksgiving today. Such foods include turkey, cranberries, corn and squash or pumpkin. It didn’t include potatoes or yams.

And, because the Pilgrims grew their food and hunted and fished, the meal wasn’t expensive. After all, they didn’t have the option of racking up a big bill at the supermarket.

Our Thanksgiving meal need not be expensive either.

To cut the cost of Thanksgiving dinner, let’s take a look at the traditional menu: Fresh roast turkey with oyster stuffing and store bought giblet gravy, fresh whole cranberry sauce, pecan candied yams, green bean casserole, boxed mix mashed potatoes, Waldorf salad, crescent rolls and butter, and to top it all off, pecan pie.

As a good substitute for pecan candied yams, try a green bean and corn mixture. Mix one pound of frozen green beans with one pound of frozen corn and cook until tender. If you like, add a sprinkle of salt, pepper, Parmesan cheese and bread crumbs.

Waldorf salad is great but it’s expensive. But apples are in season, so try an apple slaw. Shred one small head of cabbage and thinly slice. Mix together: one large cubed apple, two table spoons each of sugar and chopped onion, ½ teaspoon salt, one teaspoon lemon juice and ½ cup plain yogurt or low fat sour cream. If you like, you can add ¼ cup raisin for a little extra zing.

Instead of crescent rolls, why not try day-old brown-and-serve rolls? These are usually at the grocery store in a special section and often are sold for half-price. If you purchase rolls ahead of Thanksgiving, you can freeze them, if you have room in your freezer.

Pumpkin pie is not only rich in vitamin A, it’s a real money-saver over other types of pies. To reduce the amount of fat, you may want to try evaporated skim milk rather than the traditional whole milk. Or, a plain custard pie would even be less expensive to make. For a beverage, mix one-half of a 12-ounce can of frozen cranberry juice with a large pitcher (1/2 gallon) of ice tea.

Unless you have an old family recipe for oyster stuffing, you may want to try another recipe, especially because oysters are expensive. Additionally, raw or uncooked mollusks, such as oysters, clams, mussels and scallops, may carry a type of bacteria that multiplies even during refrigeration. Why not try a savory stuffing made from day old bread? Here is a simple recipe:

Savvy Stuffing

- 1 cup chopped celery
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons margarine or butter
- 8 cups day old bread cubes
- ½ teaspoon poultry seasoning
- ¼ cup turkey broth or prepared chicken bouillon
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon thyme
- ¾ cup turkey broth or prepared chicken bouillon

Preheat oven to 350oF. Cook onions and celery in margarine until tender. Remove from heat. Mix in bread cubes, seasonings and broth. Place in greased 8x8 inch baking dish. Cover and bake one hour.

Low-fat Gravy

2 cups prepared chicken bouillon
2 to 3 tablespoons of cornstarch
¼ cup of turkey drippings
Pepper to taste

Mix the cornstarch with enough water to make a thick paste. Slowly add the cornstarch mixture to the combined bouillon and turkey drippings while stirring over medium heat until thickened. Add pepper to taste.
Buy Cranberries to Use Now and Later

A must at all Thanksgiving dinners, cranberries are beginning to find their way into our pantries and freezers year round. This cherry little red fruit can add more than just zip to meals. It is high in fiber and vitamin C and contains just 25 calories per ½ cup of fresh berries. Cranberries are also low in sodium and are a source of Vitamins A & B, calcium, phosphorus, and iron. Packed full of antioxidants and other natural compounds cranberries promote health and wellness.

For many years healthy professionals have been recommending cranberries for prevention of urinary tract infections (UTI’s). It was long thought that this was due to the activity of the cranberries themselves and its impact on the acidity of the urine that caused the benefit. Researchers now know differently. According to the Cranberry Institute, cranberries have a bacterial blocking activity due to their flavonoid content that actually prevents the adhesion of infection causing bacteria. This bacteria-blocking activity makes cranberries effective for helping to prevent UTIs and other bacterial related conditions, potentially including gum disease and stomach ulcers. Note that cranberry products are known as a PREVENTATIVE measure and not a cure for UTIs.

Unlike other fruits, cranberries are usually considered too tart to eat alone and are combined with other ingredients to make them palatable. Most cranberry juices have sweeteners added and dried cranberries are sweetened prior to drying.

Fresh whole cranberries are available in markets from September through December. These fresh berries will keep in the refrigerator for one month.

Freezing your own berries will make them last all year long. Sort out any bruised berries and store in an airtight freezer container. These berries do not need to be thawed, but should be washed just before use. They will maintain their quality for 9-12 months.

Sweetened dried cranberries will keep for up to 12 months in a cool dry place.

Use whole berries to chop and put in salads, muffins, pancakes and cranberry sauce or relish. Put dried berries in salads or eat as snacks.

To lower calories in cranberry relish and sauce, use Splenda in place of sugar.

By: Cheryl Jones Syracuse, MS, Professor Emeritus, Ohio State University Extension

Cranberry Apple Sauce Recipe

8 apples, cored and quartered, with skin
6 ounces (½ bag) cranberries
½ cup sugar
½ cup Splenda
1 tsp. cinnamon
½ cup water

Place items in Crockpot and cook on low power all day until apples are soft. Mash apples and cranberries and refrigerate until ready to use. Serve this dish as a fruit side dish like apple sauce or serve for a nice light dessert. For more recipes and tips, visit: uscranberries.com and cranberryinstitute.org

Turkey Day Leftovers?

Cheesy turkey with Pasta

1 (16 oz) package rigatoni pasta
¼ cup butter
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 cup turkey stock
½ cup pasta sauce
1 cup water
½ (1 ounce) package dry onion soup mix
1 teaspoon crushed garlic
Salt and pepper to taste
1/3 cup shredded Monterey Jack Cheese
1/3 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
1 pound cooked turkey breast, cubed

Directions:
• Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add pasta and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente; drain.
• In a large saucepan or deep skillet, melt butter over low to medium heat; blend in flour. Slowly add turkey stock, pasta sauce, and water. Mix well. Stir in onion soup mix and garlic; season with salt and pepper.
• Sprinkle in the Monterey Jack, Cheddar cheese and turkey. Stir until the cheese is melted and the meat is heated through. Spoon sauce over pasta and serve.

Prep Time: 15 minutes Cook Time: 15 minutes Ready In: 30 minutes

Nutrition information: Servings per recipe: 6
Amount per serving: Calories: 573, Total Fat: 20 g, Cholesterol: 90mg, Sodium: 573 mg, Total Carbs: 62g, Dietary Fiber: 3.2g, Protein: 36.7g.
Turkey Vegetable Soup with Angel Hair Pasta

½ ounce dried mushroom pieces, rehydrated *
8 cups low-sodium chicken Broth
2 medium carrots, peeled, fine chopped
2 medium celery stalks, thinly sliced
1 tablespoons shallots, thinly sliced
2ounces dry angel hair pasta
1 cup cooked turkey, finely chopped
3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
Black pepper, to taste

Directions:
1. *To rehydrate dried mushrooms, cover with warm water and let stand 15 minutes. Rinse under additional water if necessary.
2. Place broth in a Dutch oven and bring to boil over high heat. Add the carrots, celery, shallots and drained mushrooms. Return to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, 15-20 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Add the pasta and continue cooking until it is al dente, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in the turkey and parsley and cook 1 minute or until thoroughly heated.

Serve with Italian bread and olive oil for dipping in place of margarine or butter.

Prep Time: 30 + minutes Cooking time: 20-30 minutes
Makes 5 servings.

EXTENSION OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED

NOVEMBER 11TH FOR VETERANS DAY

AND

NOVEMBER 26TH AND 27TH FOR THANKSGIVING

Happy Veterans Day

Happy Thanksgiving
Germ Defense Pyramid

Bleach-based cleaning routine kills 99.9% of household germs

- toilet surface and bowl
- shower/tub and drain
- kitchen and bathroom floors
- bathroom countertops

Tip: Save time with bleach-based products.

Once A Week

- faucets, appliance handles
- kitchen countertops and appliances
- flush handle

Tip: Focus on "high touch" zones.

About Three Times A Week

- sponge/dishcloths
- kitchen & bathroom sink & drain
- cutting boards
- spot clean after spills

Tip: Fill sink with water and bleach solution, soak sponges then drain—attacks three problem areas in one easy step.

Use bleach and water solution on cutting boards after each use.


The germ defense pyramid focuses on surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom that harbor the highest number of harmful bacteria. By following the Germ Defense Pyramid routine, you can reduce the level of harmful microorganisms in your home more than 99 percent, killing the germs that can make you sick.

Daily

Daily disinfecting is recommended for the most contaminated sites, including sponges and dishcloths, sink and drain areas. Cutting boards should be disinfected after every use, especially after cutting raw meat, poultry or fish and before preparing fresh produce. Bleach kills harmful bacteria that are prevalent on cutting boards and countertops, including E. coli and Salmonella, the bacteria that cause food poisoning.

Two or Three Times a Week

"High touch" zones in the kitchen and bathroom need to be cleaned and disinfected on more of an "as needed" basis, approximately two or three times per week. These areas include faucet handles, toilet flush handles and high-traffic areas on the floor of the kitchen and bathroom. Spills, of course, should be cleaned up as they occur.

Once a Week

In the bathroom, toilets need to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected once a week as do all countertops, showers, tubs and drains. Entire floors in both the bathroom and kitchen should also be cleaned and disinfected.

(Source: Charles Gerba, Ph.D., University of Arizona with The Clorox Company)
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Mary Rhyne
Editor, Mary Rhyne, Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences, 4-H, Kay County

Kay County Cooperative Extension Service
PO Box 430, Courthouse Basement
Newkirk, OK 74647-0430