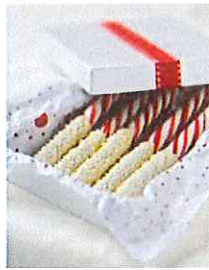


Sending Food Gifts

- Food is a popular holiday gift that can be sent safely in the mail if carefully chosen, well packaged and delivered in a timely manner.
- Items that ship well include baked goods such as cookies, brownies or pound cakes (but avoid items with perishable fillings, such as cream or custard, and remember that soft, moist cookies may mold quickly during the shipping process); coffee; and dried foods such as nuts, crackers, spices, teas or granolas.
- Consider including "safe food handling" instructions in your package, if needed.
- Make sure any perishable items stay cold at or below 41°F while in transit using insulated packaging material such as foam, ice packs, frozen gel packs and/or dry ice.
- If you receive a perishable food item in the mail, make sure it is still at or below 41°F when it arrives, otherwise you should discard it. If it is still at temperature, refrigerate or freeze immediately after checking for signs of spoilage or any package damage, such as tears, holes or signs of pests.



Eggs

- Eggs are a staple ingredient for many holiday foods such as eggnog, eggs benedict, no-bake cookies, salad dressings, quiches, soufflés and other baked goods. Eggs should be stored in the coldest part of your refrigerator and cooked to 160°F to kill any harmful bacteria, such as Salmonella, that may be present.
- If your homemade eggnog recipe calls for raw eggs, use whole, liquid or pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes.
- If you don't have pasteurized eggs available, combine the eggs and half the milk for your recipe. Cook the mixture gently, stirring constantly, until it reaches 160°F (the egg mixture should be thick enough to coat a spoon). Chill the mixture before adding the remaining milk and other ingredients. Refrigerate immediately.
- Many egg dishes may be refrigerated for serving later, but should be reheated to 165°F before serving.

Food Prep Tips

- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water; do not use soap, detergent or bleach. Use a vegetable brush to scrub firm produce, even those with skins or rinds that do not get eaten, such as melons, potatoes, cucumbers, etc.
- Keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs during purchase, transport and refrigeration.
- When preparing, do not use the same cutting boards, knives or other utensils for raw meat and fresh produce, unless you wash in between each use with hot, soapy water.

Leftovers

- Remember that you can't visually confirm if a food is safe (or unsafe) by taste, smell or appearance alone.
- Throw away all perishable foods left at room temperature longer than two hours, including meat, poultry, egg dishes, casseroles, cheese, eggnog, etc.
- Refrigerate or freeze leftovers in shallow, air-tight containers and label with an expiration date; be sure to fully defrost frozen leftovers and reheat all leftovers to 165°F.



Cooking Your Holiday Meal

- If turkey is the star of your meal, keep in mind that frozen turkey will take 24 hours per four to five pounds to thaw in the refrigerator (example: a 15-pound frozen bird takes 4 full days to thaw in the fridge.) Purchase your frozen turkey as far in advance as necessary to safely thaw it in the refrigerator. If buying a fresh turkey, purchase it only 1 to 2 days before the meal and keep it refrigerated. Never thaw on your countertop at room temperature.
- There are several methods for cooking a turkey. The single most important thing to know, no matter the cooking method, is the turkey must be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F, as measured with a food thermometer. Check temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing joint and the thickest part of the breast. Let the turkey rest for about 15 minutes before carving.
- Cook stuffing or dressing sides separately in a dish in the oven to 165°F. Never cook dressing inside; rather, combine them together after both turkey and dressing have been fully cooked.
- Beef, pork, veal and lamb roast, steak or chops should all be cooked to 145°F, with a rest time of three to five minutes.
- Ground beef, pork, veal or lamb should be cooked to 160°F.
- All poultry products (chicken, turkey, quail, etc.) should be cooked to 165°F, regardless of whether it is ground or whole.



Holiday Buffets

- A popular way to celebrate holidays is to invite friends and family over for a buffet. However, this type of food service – where foods are left out for long periods of time – leaves the door open to bacteria growth.
- Always remember to keep hot foods hot (at or above 135°F) and cold foods cold (at or below 41°F). Use a hot plate, crock pot or other heating device for hot foods. Nest cold food items into bowls of ice and replenish ice as needed.
- Foods should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep track of how long foods have been sitting on the buffet table and discard perishable food items after two hours.
- Consider setting out smaller dishes that can be “replenished” from the fridge or oven, and offer non-perishable items that can stay out for long periods of time, such as spiced nuts, chips, etc.

In the Kitchen

- Use hot water and soap to clean the sink, counters, cutting boards, pans, knives, thermometer and other utensils and serving pieces so you are starting with clean prep surfaces. To sanitize the countertop and cutting boards, use a diluted bleach solution (one tablespoon regular-strength liquid bleach to one gallon of water) and let air dry.
- Have plenty of clean cloth or paper towels on hand for holiday meal preparation and clean up. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Make sure you have a food thermometer to check cooked foods to ensure they have reached the proper temperatures; calibrate the thermometer if necessary.
- In the refrigerator, store raw meat products on the bottom shelves and store ready-to-eat foods on the top shelves (preventing cross contamination). Put raw meats in a rimmed pan to catch any leaking juices.
- Clean and sanitize knives, cutting boards and countertops between preparation of different foods.

