

Item for the Post – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & consumer Science Agent – Cottonwood Extension District

Handling Food Safely Equals Safe and Tasty Leftovers

Hopefully your Thanksgiving holiday included some traditional dishes that reinforced positive memories. Whether you had turkey, dressing, or side dishes left over, it is important that you pay attention to food safety rules.

Since leftovers can be kept in the refrigerator for three to four days, you have until the Monday after Thanksgiving to eat all of those delicious leftovers or place them in the freezer to enjoy later. After four days, spoilage bacteria can cause food to develop a bad smell or taste.

Now let's talk about the food safety of reheating leftovers. Be sure leftovers reach 165 degrees Fahrenheit, as measured with a food thermometer. Covering leftovers in the reheating process helps retain moisture and ensures that food will heat all the way through.

Additional reheating tips from the Foodsafety.gov web site include:

- Reheat sauces, soups and gravies by bringing them to a boil; then turn back to a simmer.
- When reheating in the microwave, cover and rotate the food for even heating. Arrange food items evenly in a covered microwave-safe glass or ceramic dish and add some liquid if needed. The moist heat that is created will help destroy harmful bacteria and will ensure uniform cooking.

A past issue of the You Asked It newsletter included an interesting article about storing holiday leftovers. Plastic food containers are great ways to save leftovers or other foods. But over time, plastic can warp, stain, or remain greasy. Many types of plastic containers are available, but some are designed for one-time use only. This includes takeout containers and dairy food cartons.

For reusable containers, wash them with hot soapy water or on the top rack of your dishwasher. Use the low- or no-heat drying cycle in the dishwasher. To remove stains, let the empty container sit in the direct sun a few hours. Or, soak in a mild bleach solution of 2 teaspoons plain bleach per gallon of water.

For plastic containers with an unpleasant odor, soak them in a solution of 1 teaspoon baking soda per cup water or fill with undiluted vinegar.

If you have any food safety questions, feel free to give me a call.

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