

Safety First When Grilling

Kansas State University food scientist Karen Blakeslee says getting ready for the outdoor grilling season requires one important tool in addition to tongs, a spatula and oven mitts.

“Grab that meat thermometer, too,” Blakeslee, who is also coordinator of the university’s Rapid Response Center, a source of information on food safety and other consumer topics.

“A thermometer is your best defense against any foodborne illness and checking for doneness,” she said. “Don’t rely on color, because it’s really misleading. Internal temperature is the best way to check for doneness.”

Blakeslee said digital, instant-read thermometers are the best type to use for grilling because the sensor is on the point of the thermometer.

“You will get a really quick read with those,” she said. “They will give you a reading in about 10 seconds.” She added that depending on the type of meat you are grilling, there are three temperatures to remember:

165 degrees F --For any type of poultry, whether it’s chicken or turkey, and regardless if it’s ground or even whole.

160 degrees F --For any type of ground meat, including beef, pork or lamb.

145 degrees F --For steaks and chops, whether it is beef, pork or lamb. Try to insert the thermometer in from the side, not from the top. That will give you a better reading. Blakeslee shared other tips to make sure your grilling experience is successful:

Cleaning the grill

Caked-on grease or food can cause a fire. Brush and scrub the grates well. Some spray-on grill cleaners can be effective at removing residue.

Blakeslee also suggested taking the grate out and clean leftover grease and food particles from inside the grill. She also advised inspecting the cleaning brush; ‘If you’ve got a brush where those little metal bristles are starting to come loose or break, it’s time to throw it out and get a new one,’ she said. “Those may break off on the grate itself and if you don’t see them, they could get stuck on your food, and you could ingest them.”

In addition, check the propane tank to make sure it’s full and ready to go, and that there are no cracks in the hoses.

Food Safety

Blakeslee cautioned against cross-contaminating foods. “The main thing is if you’re handling raw meat with tongs, don’t use those same tongs that handled the raw meat with your cooked vegetables or meat” she said. “Wash your tongs in between handling raw and cooked foods. If you have an extra set, use a clean set instead.

“Once you take your meat off the grill, don’t put it back on the plate that had the raw meat on it. And eat it right away. Once it starts to get warmer outside and up over 90 degrees, you can leave food out for about an hour, but after that I would put it in the refrigerator or ice chest.”

In cooler, springtime weather, Blakeslee said food can be left out for up to two hours, but then should be refrigerated.

Use an ice chest --Ice chests are convenient for storing drinks or, when filled with ice, can help to keep food cold during an outdoor party..

“You’re re-creating your kitchen outside,” Blakeslee said. “If you have access to power outside, you could even have a portable refrigerator for your gathering. Remember to plug it in early enough to make sure it’s cold.” Keep an ice chest in a covered area or out of direct sunlight, she added.

Safety precautions “Supervise the grill all the time,” she said. “Pay attention to what’s going on, because if you leave it unattended, it could spark a fire, or if kids or pets are running around outside, they may accidentally tip it over.”