

Reduce the Hassle of Holiday Food Prep

Are you hosting a holiday meal? Do you wish you could spend more time with your guests and less time in the kitchen? Last minute hurried food preparations can drain any cook's holiday spirit. Try these ideas from K-State's Dining on a Dime newsletter to help you take some of the hassle out of your holidays, while keeping food quality and food safety a top priority.

Fruits and Vegetables

***Assemble vegetables casseroles a day in advance, cover and refrigerate. Bake on the day of your dinner, planning for 15 to 20 minutes extra heating time. Heat until they're hot and steaming throughout.**

***Cut washed fruits and vegetables within a day of your meal for salads and relish trays. Keep cut fruits from turning brown by coating them with lemon, orange or pineapple juice, or a commercial anti-darkening preparation. Cover and store them in the refrigerator above raw meats and below cooked items.**

Protein Foods

***Purchase fresh raw meat, poultry or seafood no more than 1 to 2 days before your holiday meal. Freeze for longer storage.**

***If you have frozen meat, poultry or seafood, place it on a tray on the lowest shelf in the refrigerator and allow approximately 24 hours for each 5 pounds of weight for it to thaw.**

***If you cook meat, poultry or seafood the day before your meal, refrigerate it in small portions in shallow pans within 2 hours of cooking. You can place loosely covered foods in the refrigerator while they're still warm. Cover them tightly when completely cooled. On the day of your meal, reheat until hot and steaming, to 165 degrees F. as measured with a food thermometer.**

Baked Goods

***Almost all types of cookies, cakes, breads and muffins can be baked in advance and frozen for up to 2 months. Avoid freezing cakes with whipped cream or other soft fillings, since this will result in a soggy cake upon thawing.**

***Cool baked goods completely before storing them in airtight, moisture-proof containers.**

***Thaw cheesecake in the refrigerator, covered, where it will remain fresh for up to seven days. Thaw non-perishable baked goods at room temperature in their freezer container to prevent them from drying out.**

All Perishable Foods

Avoid leaving perishable foods (such as meats, fish, poultry, eggs, cooked dry beans, dairy products, and cut fruit and vegetables) at room temperature for more than two hours. This includes the total time for preparation and serving.

Hosting family and friends at holiday meals doesn't have to be exhausting. Planning ahead and taking time to do some advance preparation are keys to creating more time to enjoy your party and your guests.