

News Column

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Thanksgiving Leftovers – Eat It or Freeze It

Turkey, stuffing, pie, and more. To celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday, many of us had tables filled with these traditional dishes. But indulging on holiday meals does not necessarily end when our family members and loved ones leave the table.

It is a time-honored tradition to dig into delicious leftovers in the days following holiday celebrations. If you still have some Thanksgiving leftovers lingering in your refrigerator, now is the time to eat, freeze, or throw them out. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, leftovers can be kept in the refrigerator for three to four days and still be safe to eat. If you have already placed some of them in the freezer to enjoy later down the road, they will be of the best quality within two to six months.

Leftovers should be reheated to 165 degrees Fahrenheit. To ensure a high enough temperature is reached with a microwave, cover your dish and rotate or stir food once or twice during cooking. Microwaves can leave cold spots in food, but rotating and stirring the dish will ensure the food is heated throughout the entire serving. When using an oven, be sure to set it at 325 degrees or higher. For sauces, soups, and gravies, a rolling boil should be reached during reheating as these dishes have a higher food safety risk than other Thanksgiving dishes like meat and casseroles.

Maintaining good hygiene when handling leftovers is just as important as it is during initial food preparation. It is the first line of defense for keeping our foods free of harmful bacteria and is extremely easy to do. Wet your hands with clean, running water and lather soap on your hands. Cover all parts adequately, including the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails. Scrub for at least 20 seconds before rinsing and drying. For best practices, wash hands before, during, and after preparing food, especially if you are handling multiple kinds of foods like meat, produce, and starches.

Following these food safety tips will ensure that your delicious foods do not spoil the holiday season.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.