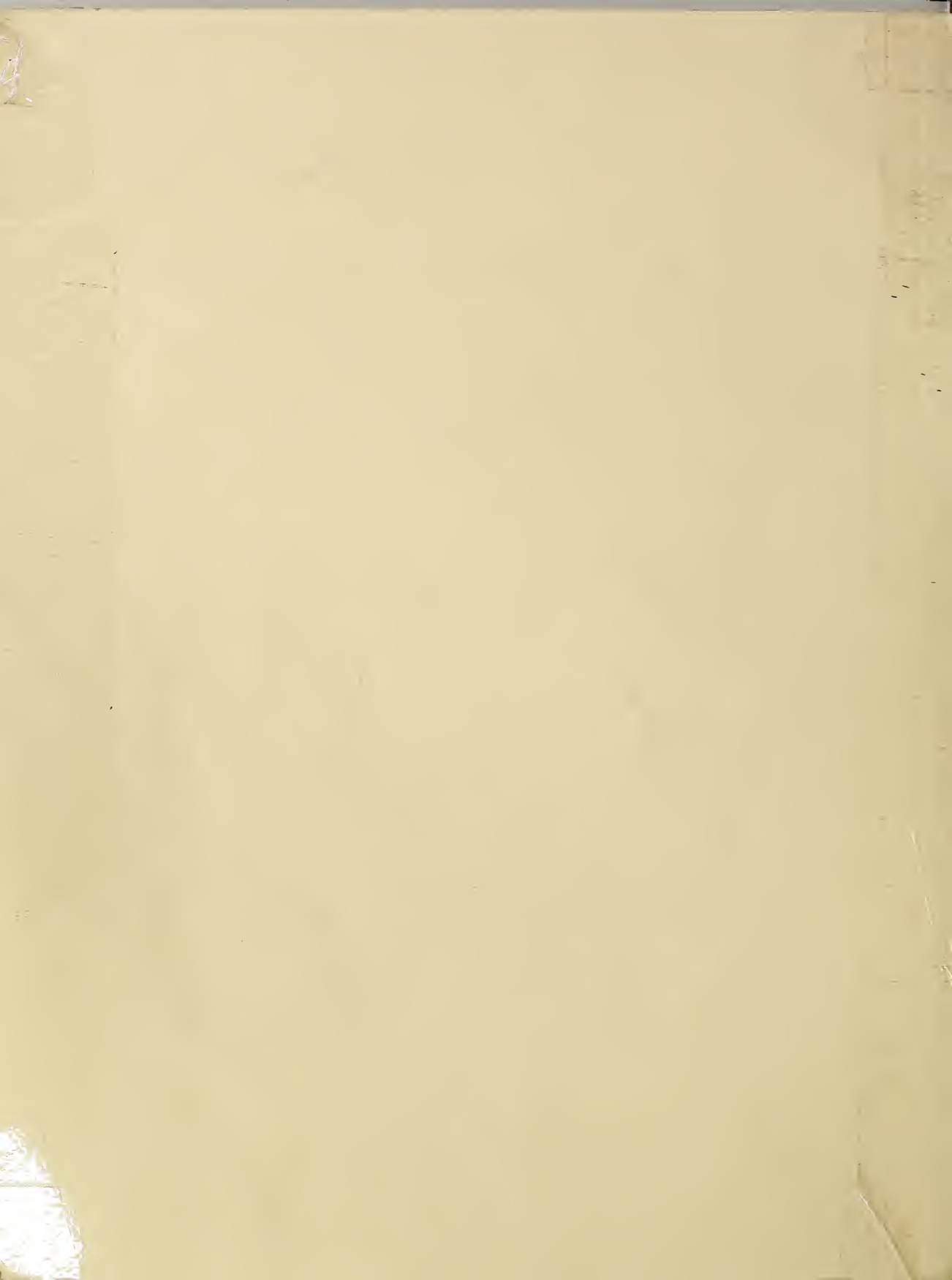


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# FOOD NEWS

**FOR CONSUMERS**

United States Department of Agriculture Volume 3 Number 4 Holidays 1986

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| Increase District

## GREAT CONNECTIONS — 800 Numbers You Need For Help With Holiday Foods

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SEP 28 '89  
SERIALS BRANCH  
USDA



The Cockroach—  
A Winter's Tale of Endurance

Office Parties—  
Coping with the Caterer

# FOOD NEWS

**FOR CONSUMERS**

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Holidays 1986  
Vol. 3, No. 4

This magazine is published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service.

**Administrator**  
Donald L. Houston

**Director, Information and Legislative Affairs**  
Nancy Robinson

**Chief, Information Branch**  
Karen Stuck

**Head, Print Media Unit**  
Danielle Schor

**Editor**  
Mary Ann Parmley

**Production**  
Maxine Grant

**Marketing**  
Laura Fox

**Art Director**  
Deborah Taylor

**Cover Illustration**  
Richard Thompson

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## PERSPECTIVES



Dear Reader:

The fall conference season is here, and USDA will be conducting two journalists' sessions with FDA this year. The parallel meetings—one in New York, October 30-31, the other in Los Angeles, November 13-14—are billed as a "Food Safety and Nutrition Update."

Ever think you don't really know much about how consumers actually think and behave? USDA's Dr. Suzanne Harris will explain "What Americans Are Eating," and compare the actuality with the dietary guidelines recently re-issued by USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. And FDA experts will report on their latest surveys on consumer perceptions about nutrition and health.

Dr. Walter Mertz, director of USDA's Human Nutrition Research Center, will provide an update on what good nutrition can and can't do, plus the latest on calcium, fiber and fish oil.

An entire morning will be devoted to food safety concerns. For any food, science or consumer journalist this will be a unique chance to hear three top experts in food protection—Dr. Donald Houston, head of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, and Dr. Fred Shank and Dr. Douglas Archer, both from FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Between sessions there will be hands-on demonstrations. Jody Siegel, from USDA's toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline, will demonstrate the Hotline's information system capabilities. Dr. Georgia Neruda and Laura Fox, Hotline managers, will address "What 30,000 Consumers Didn't Know About Basic Food Safety." The data is drawn from the Hotline computer. Chemists from USDA's Agricultural Research Service will use a new computer tester to measure what percentage of your body is fat.

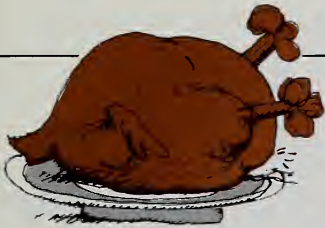
We hope you'll join us in New York or Los Angeles to be part of this great information exchange. For more information, call Marci Hilt, USDA Office of Information, (202) 447-4026.

Sincerely,

*Ann Collins Chadwick*

ANN COLLINS CHADWICK, Director  
Office of the Consumer Adviser  
Phone: (202) 382-9681

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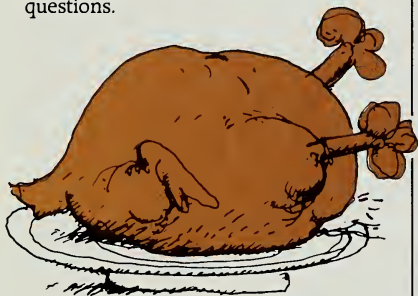
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## Consumer Education

### Hotline Calling—Those Turkey Questions

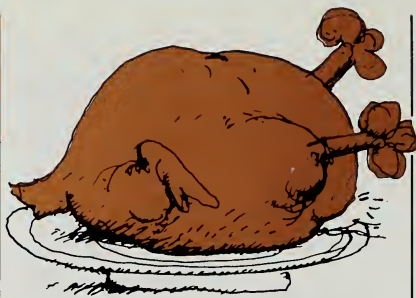
When holiday gatherings are planned, many of us spurn the convenience foods we use regularly and plan a traditional turkey dinner. But getting the large bird from its cold, naked state to the mouth-watering favorite that grandmother served isn't easy. Hundreds of new or uncertain turkey cooks call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline (800) 535-4555 for help. And here's how our home economists answer some typical turkey questions.



**Q:** I'm fixing turkey and spicy meatballs for the office party this year. How should I serve them?

**A:** For an office party, it's probably simpler—and safer—to serve *cold* meats and turkey instead of hot dishes. Hot turkey and meatballs are suitable provided that, after they are cooked and cooled, you can:

- **Keep them cold before serving**—that means access to a refrigerator or a picnic cooler with ice;
  - **Reheat them**—you'd need a microwave oven, a burner or a stove-top; and
  - **Keep them hot on the buffet table**—which would require a chafing dish, electric skillet or warming tray.
- In short, keep meats or other perishables cold (below 40° F) or hot (above 140° F). **Never leave them**



**at room temperature for more than 2 hours.**

If you don't have the right equipment, substitute cold roast beef for the meatballs. And cook the turkey at home, slice it and refrigerate it in shallow containers for transport to the party.

Serve your meats in small portions. After about an hour, refrigerate any leftovers on the platter and replenish with new stock from the refrigerator.

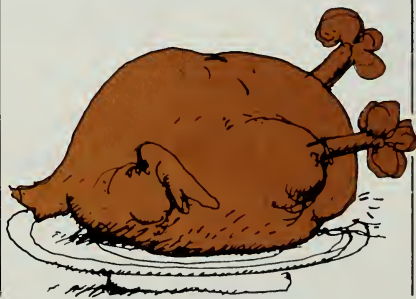
Throw away any leftovers that may have been out over 2 hours.

**Q:** My grandmother says the secret to her tasty turkey is buying a fresh not a frozen bird. In my town, the stores are sold out of fresh turkeys a week before the holidays. What should I do?

**A:** To equal her success, follow her recipe, but buy a fresh turkey *only* if you can arrange purchase shortly before your meal. USDA microbiologists recommend cooking poultry within **2 days** of the date of purchase.

If turkeys are refrigerated at home any longer than that, you could have spoilage problems.

So, if you can't follow that time frame, buy a frozen bird. Or bake

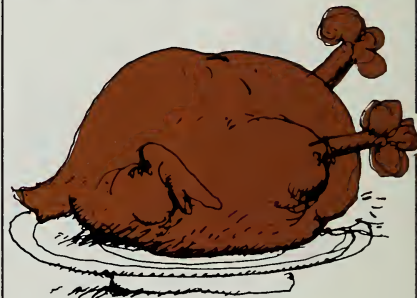


your fresh bird soon after purchase, carve and refrigerate it until your holiday meal. The cooked turkey will keep in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days. Stuffing and gravy—in separate dishes—will keep 1 to 2 days. To reheat gravy, bring it to a rolling boil before serving.

**Q:** I've never prepared a turkey before. I have a 16-pound turkey in the freezer—how long will it take to defrost?

**A:** Here are the do's and don'ts on defrosting turkey:

**Thawing turkeys. Don't defrost the turkey on the counter or table top.** Bacteria multiply rapidly at room temperature. In fact, 60° to 125° F are called the "**DANGER ZONE.**" In the hours it takes for a turkey to thaw, the surface bacteria could multiply to dangerous levels.

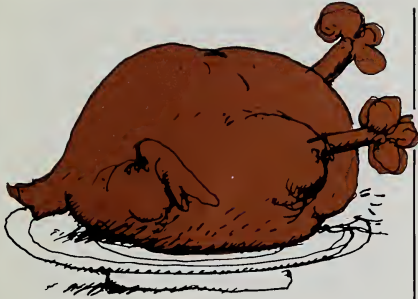


• Thaw turkey in the refrigerator. A 16-pound turkey will thaw in about 3 days, as this chart shows.

#### Refrigerator Thawing

<b>Whole Turkey</b>		
8-12 pounds		1-2 days
12-16 pounds		2-3 days
16-20 pounds		3-4 days
20-24 pounds		4-5 days
<b>Large Pieces</b>		
half, quarter		1-2 days

• Or thaw the wrapped turkey in cold water. Be sure the wrapping is intact. If not, wrap it in a plastic bag. Immerse in cold water in the sink or in a large tub. Refill with cold water frequently—about every 30 minutes. A



16-pound bird should thaw in about 9 hours.

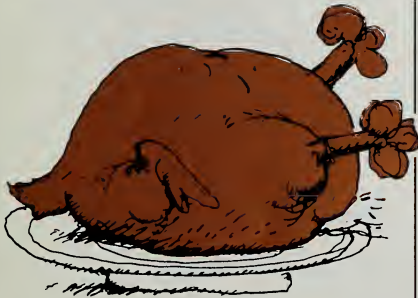
**Cold-Water Thawing (Whole Turkeys)**

8-12 pounds	4-6 hours
12-16 pounds	6-9 hours
16-20 pounds	9-11 hours
20-24 pounds	11-12 hours

- Another option is thawing in the microwave if it's big enough. Follow the manufacturer's directions.

**Washing turkeys.** After it's thawed, wash the turkey under cold running water. Remove the neck and giblets and wash them, then wash inside and outside the bird. Drain thoroughly.

**Cleaning Up.** To prevent the spread of bacteria, **use plenty of soap and hot water to wash your hands, utensils and cutting board as well as the sink and faucet handles** and anything else that came in contact with the raw bird or your soiled hands.



**Q:** How can you tell when a turkey is done?

**A:** Cook the turkey 15 to 18 minutes per pound. Then remove it

and test for doneness.

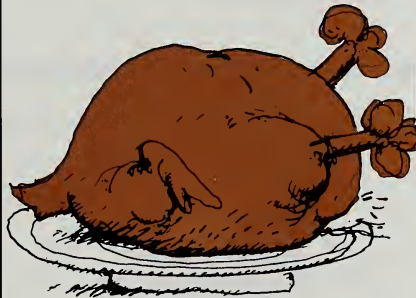
Insert a meat thermometer into the thigh near the joint. In about 3 minutes, read it. The turkey is done at 180°-185° F.

Or stick a long-tined fork into the inner thigh. If the juices run clear—not pink—the turkey is done.

**Q:** I'd like to make stuffing for our Thanksgiving turkey, but it's so time-consuming. Any short-cuts?

**A:** The fastest—and safest—method is to bake the stuffing in a separate dish, not inside the turkey. That way, you can mix it while the bird is cooking, and it will bake in 30 minutes. An unstuffed turkey bakes faster too.

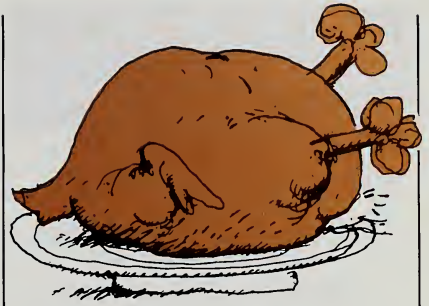
If you prefer a stuffed turkey, for safety's sake, don't stuff the bird until just before putting it in the oven. Otherwise, you run the risk of food poisoning bacteria multiplying in the stuffing.



For that same reason, it's best **not** to buy a fresh bird that's been stuffed at the grocery.

Here are some time-saving tips for stuffing the bird safely:

- Wait until just before baking to stuff the turkey.
- Stuff the cavity lightly; stuffing expands.
- Check the stuffing for doneness. Remove the bird from the oven and insert a thermometer into the stuffing. After 5 minutes, check the temperature—it must reach 165° F.
- When the turkey's done, scoop out the stuffing and serve it in a separate dish. **Never leave the stuffing in the bird.**



**Q:** I'm fixing the turkey for our Thanksgiving dinner to be held at my aunt's home 30 miles away. I'd rather cook it at home that morning. Is that safe?

**A:** Yes, but only if you'll be sitting down to eat the turkey within 2 hours after taking it from the oven. Also, you need to remove the stuffing after you take the bird out of the oven, and you must keep both bird and stuffing either hot or cold until serving time.

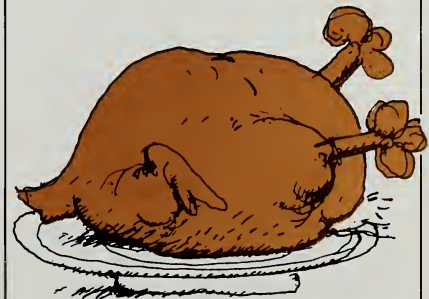
To cool the stuffing quickly, put it in the freezer. Then keep it on ice in a cooler until you can reheat and serve.

Keep the fully-cooked turkey hot by wrapping it in foil, newspaper, and towels. Put it in a large insulated picnic "cooler" or cardboard box stuffed with newspaper.

**Never partially cook meat or poultry and complete cooking later.** Partial cooking provides ideal conditions for bacterial growth.

If you can't make it from oven to table in 2 hours, then prepare the bird in advance, slice, cool it quickly in the refrigerator and transport it in a cooler with ice.

—Hedy Ohringer



For more details, request "Talking About Turkey" from the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009, or call the Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800-535-4555. The Hotline operates weekdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern Time.

## Food Safety

### King Cockroach

by Judy Liggett

Admit it. Sometime in your past you've run across the lowly cockroach. Maybe in your first apartment. Not a penthouse, but it was yours. Or so you thought, until you learned that vile stowaways were in the rental space.

The war against the cockroach has been long and hard. Roaches have lived on earth an estimated 300-400 million years. Some 3,500 cockroach species have been identified worldwide, and probably at least that many more are unidentified.

According to Dr. Donald Cochran, professor of entomology at Virginia Polytechnic University, "We are holding our own against them, but the insects are potent adversaries. Also pest control is a phenomenon of a highly technical country. Many countries accept cockroaches as a fact of life."

#### Biology

A look at the cockroach's biology explains why they've had such a long history.

While there are variations in species, certain attributes are common to all cockroaches. Most have broad, flat bodies that enable them to hide under cracks.

Their nervous systems are very sensitive. When the cockroach senses danger, nerve impulses move rapidly to its six legs, and the insect immediately seeks a hideaway. Some roaches also fly. It's easy to see why they're great escape artists.

They aren't picky eaters either. They seem to prefer starchy foods like bread and potatoes, but they'll eat anything available. They also eat non-food products like paper, glue and book bindings. They have a reputation for being filthy because they

sometimes feed on fecal matter.

They can also go a long time without food or water. But eventually they migrate in search of food. This explains why the lowly roach hasn't gone the way of the dinosaur!

Their reproductive capacity has also ensured their survival. They only need to mate once during their lives to produce many offspring (16-40 eggs at a time). But many keep on mating. One species, the Surinam cockroach, can even reproduce without a male.

Cockroaches carry their eggs in cases. A female may carry this case until the eggs hatch, or deposit it in an inconspicuous place—like under the kitchen cabinet. At hatching time, soft white "nymphs" emerge. As the nymphs grow to adulthood, they will molt (shed their old skin) several times.

The smallest full-grown cockroach is a fraction of an inch long; the largest may be 3-4 inches long.

#### Health Hazards

Cockroaches are more than dis-

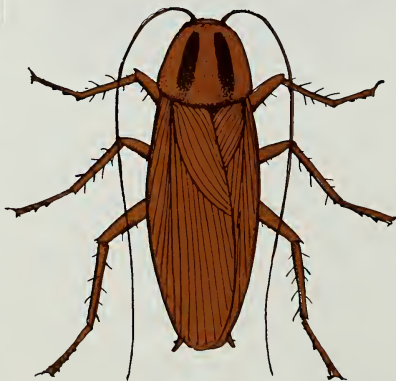
tasteful. They are disease-carriers. They've been implicated as carriers of many food poisoning bacteria, including *Salmonella*, *Clostridium perfringens*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

As Mark Wheeler, a USDA entomologist says, "The real problem with roaches is their eating habits." As scavengers, they eat contaminated food and waste. They then carry disease to any other food they contact. Such contact includes vomiting, excreting wastes and laying eggs on human food.

In recent years, we've learned that large roach infestations can also trigger allergic reactions in some people. Dr. Bann Kang, an immunologist at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Chicago, has found that 58 percent of asthmatic adults and 69 percent of asthmatic children have allergic reactions to cockroaches. These range from skin swelling and redness to full-fledged asthma attacks.

For an asthmatic, this could be life-

**Four Common American Roaches.** Some 35 cockroach varieties are found in the United States, but *these* are the troublemakers.



**German Roach**

Body: Light to Dark Brown.

Size:  $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{8}$ ".

This common roach likes the kitchen.



**Brown-banded Roach**

Body: Light Brown.

Size:  $\frac{3}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ ".

A roach that perches high in heated rooms in boxes, books, desks and closets.



threatening. The reaction is caused when cockroach protein in the air (from decomposed insects) is inhaled by the victim. It is unlikely that those not suffering from asthma or other allergies would have such a reaction. The best advice for the susceptible is to see a doctor. Then, get rid of the infestation.

### Signs of Infestation

How do you know if you have a roach problem? This isn't a dumb question. Roaches avoid people and roam at night. You may not even know you have any.

"But...for every roach you see, there are hundreds you don't see. Some people would put that estimate higher," says Harvey Massey, president of Walker Chemical company in Orlando, Florida.

You may also see other tell-tale signs like roach droppings, which look like specks of black dust, or egg cases, about a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch capsule shape which may be black, yellow or red-brown.

### Roach Control

There are different ways of fighting this pest. If you're lucky, the first "foot-soldiers" that make it into your territory can be starved out. But if an entire army has encamped in your home, you may have to attack—using both natural and chemical treatments to banish the enemy.

### Starving Them Out

- Keep your kitchen clean. Don't let dirty dishes pile up. Clean counters. Empty garbage every day.
- Never leave food out or on the shelf in open packages. Roaches eat through plastic bags, so use a stronger container like a glass jar with a screw lid.
- Don't bring outside trash cans into the house. Especially in tropical areas, like Florida, roaches live outside year-round and could easily move indoors.
- Don't move roaches to a new home. Spray belongings beforehand.

Throw away moving cartons after unpacking.

- If you're in the habit of using grocery bags as trash liners, be aware that a roach family may be hiding in those bags.
- Clean pet food dishes as soon as Fido has eaten. You don't want to be providing a cockroach smorgasbord.
- **Since roaches are disease-carriers, never eat food that has crossed this vermin's path. If you see roach droppings or egg cases in food, discard it.**

### Sending in the Big Guns

When the enemy encroaches and gets downright brazen about their assaults, it's time to fight back with stronger measures.

People in the Southeast spend an estimated \$554 million annually on roach control, says exterminator Harvey Massey. Consequently, there are many pest control services available to the consumer. Most use a combination of conventional pesticides and the new hydroprene (an insect growth regulator).

It's a "one-two punch." The hydroprene attacks the roach's hormonal system, interfering with its ability to molt and reproduce.

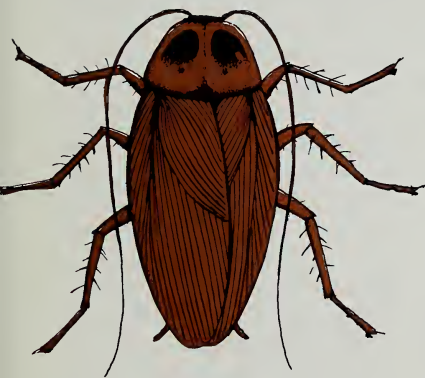
If hydroprene were used alone, it would take 3-4 months to see the results. That's why other chemicals, such as organo-phosphates, are also used. They kill shortly after application.

Commercial pesticides must be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency before they are sold. If used according to the label, these chemicals should pose no threat to humans or pets.

### Selecting Exterminators

Follow the advice of the National Pest Control Association (NPCA) in Northern Virginia:

- It pays to read the contract. Services and warranties vary widely. Get at least three estimates.
- Check a prospective company with the Better Business Bureau, or the NPCA (703) 573-8330, or with your state or local pest control associations.

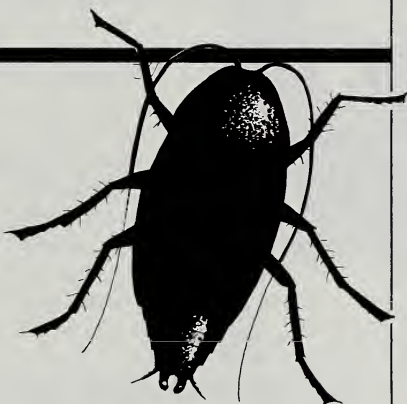


**American Roach**

Body: Red to Dark Brown.

Size:  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2".

This "giant" swims and flies. Sewer and other pipes lead it to basements, furnace rooms.



**Oriental Roach**

Body: Dark Brown to Shiny Black.

Size:  $1\frac{1}{4}$ ".

This swimmer is not a "waterbug," though found near toilets, drains and sewers.

## Special Feature

### Have a Toll-Free Holiday

by Mary Ann Parnley

When bells are ringing, tinsel is twining and nerve endings are jangling, what could be better than an easy way to answer your party and food preparation questions?



Yes, Virginia, there are a number of toll-free lines now where trained personnel can help in your hour of need. Here they are.

All numbers begin 800- or 1-800- where necessary.\*

**Ham.** At Honey Baked Hams, Saugus, Mass., operators can help with preparation, serving and storage questions on ham. Frequently asked:

What kind of ham and how much would I need for a certain-sized party? Phone: 800-343-4267. Hours: 9:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Mon.-Sat., Eastern Time.

**Turkey.** It's called the Butterball Turkey Talk Line, and the focus is turkey crisis intervention. These operators are the pioneers in helping first-time cooks or anyone who may be heading for fowl trouble. Holiday hours and number: 800-323-4848, 8 a.m.-8 p.m. weekdays, Central Time, Nov. 3 thru Dec. 24. The line also operates the two weekends preceding Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Eve.

The rest of the year, Beatrice Meats Consumer Communications offers help with Beatrice meat products. This includes nutrition, recipe and handling information. Phone: 800-325-7424, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays, Central Time.

**Steak.** Whether you're struggling with steak au poivre (pepper steak sauteed in cognac) or just need a use for leftover sirloin, the Omaha Steaks (Omaha, Neb.) Customer Service Line can help. Dial 800-228-9872, 8 a.m.-10 p.m. weekdays, Central Time, for general cooking and handling advice. Dial 800-228-2778, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays, to reach their home economist with nutrition or diet questions.

**Cheese.** Holiday parties are often cheese times, and Miceli Dairy Products (Cleveland, Ohio) can answer questions about their Italian line—ricotta, mozzarella and provolone. They also advise on the fat and sodium content of their diet cheeses. For recipes for Sicilian Cream Cake and a special cannoli, ask for the free recipe booklet. Call 800-443-7466, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

**Nuts.** Come the holidays and you may see visions of fashionable Parisians buying roast chestnuts on the Champs d'Elysee. They get a lot of questions on how to roast chestnuts at Fiesta Nuts (Port Washington, N.Y.). Customers also ask less glamorous things like how non-rancid walnuts should smell. Nut experts stand ready. Phone: 800-645-3296, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

**Fruit.** From kumquats to cherimoya, also known as sweet sop in the Caribbean, exotic fruits are today's hot produce item. Still many customers aren't sure how to serve them. So Harry and David Mail Order Fruits (Medford, Ore.) includes recipe inserts with exotic fruit orders. You can make cherimoya sherbet, for instance. They also answer questions about the storage and usability of just-your-average fruits. Call: Thanksgiving through Christmas, 800-547-3033, 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Pacific Time, seven days a week.

**Wine.** Ah yes, my little chickadees, Windsor Vineyards (Windsor, Cal.) has a wine line. Customer representatives can discuss punch recipes and what wine to serve with oysters Rockefeller. Their lab people can help you when that vintage bottle looks cloudy or otherwise strange. Phone: 800-862-4910, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Pacific Time, Mon.-Sat.

**Fish.** Believe it or not, 800-EAT-FISH connects you with the Rhode Island Seafood Council's free fish advice line. These operators can answer purchase, preparation and nutrition questions on seafood. They also publish a consumer newsletter—complete with fish recipes—8 times a year. Phone: 800-EAT-FISH, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

### Help for Holiday Bakers

**Fleischmann's Baker's Hotline** has operators ready to help with yeast baking questions. Can't get your bread to rise? Need to use a new quick yeast with an old recipe? Phone: 800-932-7800, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time. After hours, an

\*By no means the only consumer lines on food, these numbers were drawn from AT&T's Toll-Free 800 Numbers, Consumer Edition. Only numbers accessible to the entire country were used.

## USDA's Consumer Lines

**The Meat and Poultry Hotline**, the only comprehensive food safety line operating year-round, has specially trained home economists to help consumers prevent food poisoning. They offer advice on the safe handling, storage and cooking of meat and poultry. Why call over the holidays? People not used to cooking for large groups and trying to serve buffet style—where food may sit out too long—can make serious mistakes. So, if you have a question, call **800-535-4555**.

Residents of Washington, D.C. call 447-3333. The hotline runs 10 a.m.–4 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

**USDA's Cooperative Extension Service.** It's not toll-free, but a local call will connect you with a nearby Extension office. They offer nutrition, preparation and even recipe advice for *all* foods. Check the phone book under county government or state university listings.

answering machine takes your number so they can call you back.

**Pillsbury** corporation has home economists available to answer the full range of questions about their products. This includes microwave cooking and nutritional aspects. Phone: 800-328-4466, 8:15 a.m.–6 p.m. weekdays, Central Time.

**Hershey's** has its *chocolate* line. Doesn't that conjure up Willy Wonka-type dreams? Operators there can answer questions on using and cooking with Hershey products. Phone: 800-468-1714, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

## Who-You-Gonna-Call with Health Questions?

You've made a good start on a diet and really want to stick with it through the holidays. Or Uncle Albert, coming to visit, is now on a strict, low-salt diet. Where do you turn with this kind of problem?

On the **Sweet 'N Low Hotline**, nutritionists can discuss use of their artificial sweetener and salt substitute. They can also suggest methods and recipes to lower fat and cholesterol. Phone: 800-231-1123, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

**Mrs. Dash's Sodium Information Hotline** emphasizes cooking without salt. Operators can assist you by looking up the sodium content of fresh, processed and fast foods—everything from raw celery to a MacYummy sandwich. Naturally they answer questions about Mrs. Dash products too. Phone: 800-622-DASH, 10 a.m.–8 p.m. weekdays, Eastern Time.

## Up to Here with Leftovers?

**Dow's Consumer Response Line** offers help on freezing and re-using

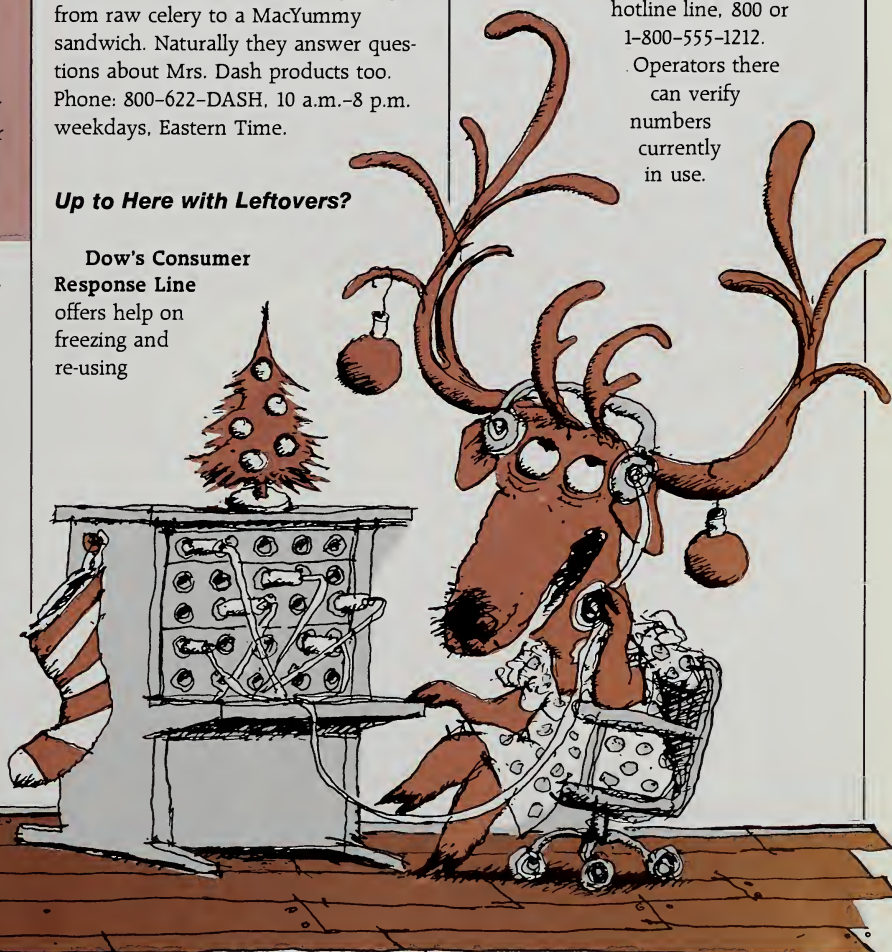
those leftovers that might otherwise drive you to despair. They even have a free booklet called "Freezing Tips." Phone: 800-428-4795, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. weekdays, Eastern time.

## 800-Line Problems?

Don't be left in toll-free limbo when a number doesn't work. While more and more companies are starting 800 numbers because of the unparalleled insight it gives them into what customers are thinking, managing a hotline can also, say corporate people, "be frightening." You open a new line and get swamped with calls, they say, then the brass says "close it and let's re-think this." Therefore lines debut and fold with some frequency. When in doubt, call AT&T's master

hotline line, 800 or 1-800-555-1212.

Operators there can verify numbers currently in use.



## News Wire

### Building Better Bacon

The "B" on your "BLT" sandwich may soon be *different* following USDA's recent approval of new ways to reduce nitrite levels in bacon.

Now, bacon producers with approved in-plant quality controls can lower nitrite from 120 parts per million (ppm) to 100 ppm.

This is desirable since, at high frying temperatures, nitrite in the bacon can form nitrosamines, some of which cause cancer in laboratory animals.

Then why not eliminate nitrite totally? Because nitrite is an important preservative which protects against botulism, a rare but deadly food poisoning.

USDA does permit some bacon and other cured products like hot dogs to be made without nitrite, provided they're labeled "uncured." Such products must be handled in the same

way as fresh meat. So, if no other preservation method is used to substitute for nitrite—such as canning, pickling or drying—the product label must warn "not preserved—keep refrigerated below 40° F at all times."

The new rule offers bacon processors two other options as well. These are: (1) Lowering nitrites to 40 to 80 ppm in combination with certain bacterial starter cultures; or (2) Adding vitamin E to help block nitrosamine formation.

A processor who opts to use starter cultures—helpful bacteria that produce

## FOOD NEWS Quiz #5

### Raw hors d'oeuvres—like sushi and steak tartare—are they safe to eat?

Doubtless you'll see a lot of raw tidbits at holiday gatherings this year, and you could understandably be tempted.

Steak tartare! The very name has class, as befits the elegant little

mounds of finely ground and seasoned raw sirloin on buttered pumpernickel.

And sushi—a name from the exotic East—the raw fish served with pungent sauces, has rapidly been gaining popularity lately.

Unless you like taking chances, though, you probably shouldn't eat them. They can make you sick.

Take steak tartare. Raw or undercooked ground beef may contain food poisoning bacteria like *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus* and *Campylobacter*. While they normally produce intestinal flu-like symptoms, complications can be serious.

Or you could find parasitic tapeworm larvae in your raw meat. They produce illness often characterized by muscle fatigue. Untreated, this condition—



lactic acid—can make bacon with low nitrite levels because the bacteria-produced acid as well as the nitrite protect against botulism.

While it tastes and fries fine, lactic-acid-processed bacon may not be quite as “red” as conventional bacon.

The other option—adding vitamin E, known technically as alpha-tocopherol—works because the vitamin blocks nitrosamine formation in fried bacon.

Of course, all ingredients will be listed on the label.

—Hedy Ohringer

cysticercosis—can result in serious nervous system and heart problems.

Now let's look at the sushi. Tapeworm larvae found in raw fish can cause anemia, fatigue, dizziness, numbness of the extremities and a variety of other symptoms.

Raw fish may also carry the roundworm larvae that cause a parasitic illness called anisakiasis. Symptoms are abdominal pain and vomiting.

Tapeworm larvae are found in fresh-water fish like pike and perch; anisakiasis-producing larvae, in salt-water fish like herring and cod. Both kinds of worm larvae are found in salmon.

Why be one of the 4 million Americans who contracts a foodborne illness this year? Those are the current estimates from the National Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

It isn't necessary. Bacteria and parasites in raw meat and fish are easily destroyed by thorough cooking. Bacterial growth can be inhibited by keeping hot foods above 140° F. Most worm larvae are killed within 5 minutes at that temperature too.

And simply keep cold foods cold. Most bacterial growth is severely restricted at refrigerator temperatures (40° F or lower). Most worm larvae die when held frozen at 0° F for a few days.

—Arthur Lipton

## **New Process Makes Low-Salt Cheese Taste Better, Not Bitter**

Cheese lovers to whom low-sodium cheese tastes bitter or “metallic” may soon find a more palatable low-sodium cheese on the market.

Food scientists at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, are using a technology called ultrafiltration to produce low-sodium cheese.

“It's extremely difficult to reduce the sodium in cheese and get a cheese that resembles the original,” said Dr. Robert Lindsay, the professor who heads the USDA-funded project.

Why? In cheesemaking, sodium is essential in developing the flavor and texture of cheese. It also controls processing and prevents bacterial growth.

Some processors have tried adding salt substitutes at the processing stage, but this can result in a harsh or bitter tasting cheese.

“But ultrafiltration can produce cheese with 60 percent less sodium and still maintain the cheese's distinctive flavor and texture,” said Lindsay.

In ultrafiltration, water and some natural salt are removed from the milk. While some additional salt is added later to control flavor and processing, the ultrafiltered cheese still contains less salt than regular cheese, Lindsay explained.

For more information on ultrafiltration, contact Dr. Robert Lindsay, Department of Food Science, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin. Phone: 608/262-3046.

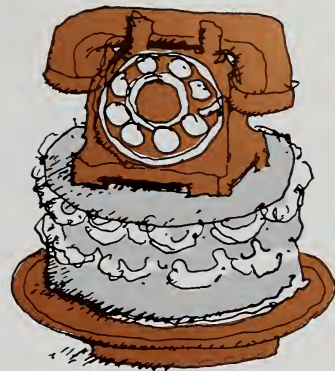
—Irene Goins

## **Happy Anniversary, Meat and Poultry Hotline**

This past July marked the first anniversary of USDA's toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline.

Some 30,000 calls came in over the 800-535-4555 number last year, as compared to about 2,000 the hotline received annually before going toll-free.

—Irene Goins



“Calls have come in from almost everywhere—all 50 states and Puerto Rico,” said Dr. Georgia Neruda, hotline coordinator.

Who were the callers? New cooks, experienced cooks, business people, health professionals, educators, the media—all used the hotline service.

An analysis of hotline calls shows that 86 percent were from consumers. Of that group:

- 72 percent asked basic food safety, handling and preparation questions;
- 10 percent had serious food safety concerns on food poisoning or possibly unsafe meat and poultry products;
- 9 percent had questions on inspection, labeling, additives and residues in meat and poultry;
- 9 percent called with questions on non-meat-and-poultry items and were referred to the proper agency.

Why so many calls on basic food safety? “People want to know about things that affect them directly,” said Dr. Neruda. “Chiefly, callers want to make sure that the food they prepare, serve and eat is safe.

“More important, by calling the hotline, consumers are showing they realize that they have a role to play in protecting themselves from food poisoning,” said Dr. Neruda. “If the food safety information given by our home economists is followed, it could reduce the number of food poisoning cases occurring daily in homes throughout the country.”

Current estimates indicate this could be as many as 4 million cases each year.



# Pasta's Perfect

When you have to feed 2,000 hungry teenagers on a tight budget, you must be alert to economical ways to make the menu more appealing, says Frances Ziter, food service director at Cathedral High School in Springfield, Massachusetts.

When Ziter heard how successful a friend had been with a pasta bar in downtown Boston catering to the young crowd, she felt she saw a winning formula.

Her cafeteria is now one of a few nationwide to offer a pasta bar. Like the salad bar, the pasta bar is probably an idea whose time has come.

What are the specifics at Ziter's school? Cathedral High is a private school with some 2,000 students from 31 towns and cities in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Ziter's daily menu includes nine different meals, all of which meet U.S. Department of Agriculture meal patterns approved for use in the national school lunch program. Students can also purchase items a la carte. Four separate serving areas keep lines moving swiftly and give diners more time to enjoy their food in the large, sunny dining room.

On a typical day recently, 300 students—roughly 15 percent—chose the pasta bar option, introduced just

two years ago. The bar is a hot food cart with trays of macaroni or spaghetti and meat or marinara sauce.

The pasta bar is offered only every other week because of the work involved in cooking the pasta fresh daily. But because the timing is precise and the pasta is not overcooked, any leftovers can be used the following day in the salad bar.

Under the National School Lunch Program, the USDA provides both federal funds and donated foods. This allows Ziter to cover food, labor, operating and equipment costs, and still offer the approved meal to students for only 75 cents.

Her cash outlays for the pasta bar menu are as low as 28 to 41 cents per meal, including food purchases and salaries for two attendants. The total cost depends on whether the menu includes two or three varieties of pasta and sauce.

"Donated government commodities allow us to hold costs down," Ziter says. "In a typical menu, the pasta, ground beef and tomato sauce, cheese sticks, salad dressing and dinner rolls are all or in part donated."

To add variety to the pasta bar, Ziter can also use low-cost processed products including noodles, tortellini, manicotti, lasagna, ravioli and maca-

roni or shells with cheese. These products are supplied at discount by commercial firms that contract with the state to use federally donated ingredients like cheese, oil and flour.

A USDA study\* released in May confirmed that giving commodities to school districts provided more assistance than proposed alternatives of cash aid or letters of credit to purchase foods.

"By saving in one area, we can absorb higher costs in another," Ziter said. "For instance, we can buy more higher-priced items like fruits and vegetables in season, and even occasionally include a luxury item like strawberry shortcake."

Ziter says the pasta bar works because it responds to today's changing tastes while taking full advantage of the donated commodities that are a mainstay of nutritious, affordable school meals.

—Wini Scheffler, USDA  
Food and Nutrition Service  
3101 Park Center Drive  
Alexandria, Va. 22302  
(202) 756-3276

\*"Evaluation of Alternatives to Commodity Donations in the National School Lunch Program," 5-2-86. To order: John Endahl, Rm. 3017, USDA-FNS, 3101 Park Center Dr., Alexandria, Va. (703) 756-3115.

# the Children's Page

## Junior Goodman—New Kid in the Kitchen

by Liz Lapping

Everyone in fourth grade knew Junior Goodman. He was famous for his peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!

But Junior had bigger plans—he wanted to cook the Thanksgiving turkey! His mother said he could help as long as he followed instructions. There was a lot to learn, she said, about keeping food safe from food poisoning.

**Rule Number 1** came up when they got their big turkey home. Mother asked Junior to put it in the refrigerator first thing.

"Why?" he asked. Because, she said, germs—called bacteria—on the turkey can grow fast at room temperature. But the cold refrigerator slows their growth so people don't get sick.

The next day, Thanksgiving morning, Junior was up early. He ran downstairs to take the turkey out of the refrigerator. Mother said, "Okay, **Rule Number 2** is always wash your hands in hot, soapy water before you work with food. This washes away most of the germs on your hands that could get on food."

Mother washed the turkey too. She rinsed it in cold water, inside and out. She sprinkled it with her special spice mix. Then she covered it to put back into the refrigerator.

Junior was excited. "I want to help," he said. "Careful," said Mother.

Junior jerked the heavy pan off the table. Oh no! It wasn't balanced. The turkey crashed out and skidded across the floor. They washed it again and then put it away.

Then things really started to get busy. Guests were ringing the door-

bell, and it was only 10 o'clock.

Mother was mixing the dressing. "Why didn't you stuff the turkey last night?" Junior asked. "It would have saved time."

Even in the refrigerator, Mother said, some germs can grow in stuffing inside a big bird. It doesn't get as cold in there. So it's best to stuff a turkey just before you pop it in the oven.

So that's what they did, and . . . **Rule Number 3** . . . Mother put the meat thermometer in so she could be sure the turkey cooked to 185° F. At that high heat, any germs that were on the turkey should be killed.

The meal was nearly ready. The turkey smelled great. The pumpkin pie looked wonderful. Everything was perfect, right?

Well. Little Kevin, four, was exploring the house when he heard



meowing coming from the basement. He opened the door and out bounced Space Invader, the cat. Spacey ran straight for the kitchen smells.

"Uh oh, Junior, better put Spacey back in the basement," Mother said. "He just wants to watch, Mom," said Junior. "**Rule Number 4**," laughed Mother, "is that pets carry germs that can get on food. So wash your hands after you put him away too."

When dinner was served that afternoon, everyone said Junior's first turkey was a great success!

Junior knew he'd learned some important food safety rules too. Can you match the rules with the reasons why?

**Matching.** Put the letter of the reason in front of each rule.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Refrigerate fresh meat and poultry as soon as you get home from the store.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Wash your hands with hot water and soap before handling food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Make sure fresh poultry cooks to 185° F on the inside.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Keep pets out of the kitchen.

- a. To wash germs off your hands.
- b. Germs die at these high temperatures.
- c. Your cat may demand pizza.
- d. Cold temperatures slow germ growth.
- e. Pets carry all kinds of germs.

(Answers below upside-down.)

Parents, for more information on preparing and serving turkey, order: *Talking About Turkey*. Free from: the Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, Co. 81009.

Answers: 1-d, 2-a, 3-b, 4-e.

# Quiz Your Caterers: Can They Pass This Food Safety Test?

Whether you volunteered, were drafted or your job includes party planning, this year's office party is now your responsibility. You turn to a caterer for help.

Not only should you be concerned that this year's "in" fare is served and that the cost is acceptable, you also need to quiz your caterer about food safety practices.

Why? Because food that is not properly prepared, transported and served can lead to food poisoning—not a happy ending to a holiday party.

You may want to ask prospective caterers these questions before you sign one up for your party.

**Q:** Does the catering company have a permit or license?

**A:** Most catering companies are considered food service facilities and must be licensed as restaurant operations. This means they are inspected twice a year by the local health department, and probably are aware of safe food handling practices.

But companies or individuals who prepare food only in a client's home or party setting are *not* regulated or inspected by the local health department. These operators may not be aware of all safe food handling principles. Check to see if the operator has a certificate from an established food service sanitation course. These courses are offered and accredited by health departments, as well as by various professional associations.

**Q:** Where will the food be cooked?

**A:** If the food preparation is to take place at the caterer's establishment, plan to visit the facility prior to selection. Obviously, the facility should be clean. Beyond that, make sure there is sufficient refrigeration space for large quantities of food. Ovens should also accommodate large

amounts of food so that cooking won't need to be done too far in advance of the party.

There should be separate areas in the kitchen for handling raw and cooked products. When raw and cooked products mix, spoilage and food poisoning bacteria from the raw product can contaminate the cooked product.

Be sure the food will be fully cooked the first time around. Partial cooking can promote the growth of spoilage and food poisoning bacteria.

If the food will be cooked at your office, make sure the cooking area is thoroughly cleaned and that you have sufficient heating and refrigeration equipment. Plan enough time for thorough cooking of the food.

**Q:** How will the food be transported?

**A:** Whether the cooking will take place at your office or at the caterer's facility, the transportation of the food is critical.

All perishable foods must be held at 40° F or below to minimize bacterial growth during transit periods. Refrigerated trucks, or at the very least, insulated coolers should be used. Cooked foods that will be transported heated must be held at 140° F or above. Usually the caterer will use warming units. Insist on it.

**Q:** How will the food be kept hot or cold during the party?

**A:** To remain safe, food should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. All cold foods should remain at no higher than 40° F. This can be accomplished by resting serving plates on a bed of crushed ice. Hot food should be served from chafing dishes or warming trays registering 140° F. Caution: Frequently, warmers only hold at 110°-120° F, a good growth temperature for some bacteria.

**Q:** What is the plan for replenishing foods on a buffet table?

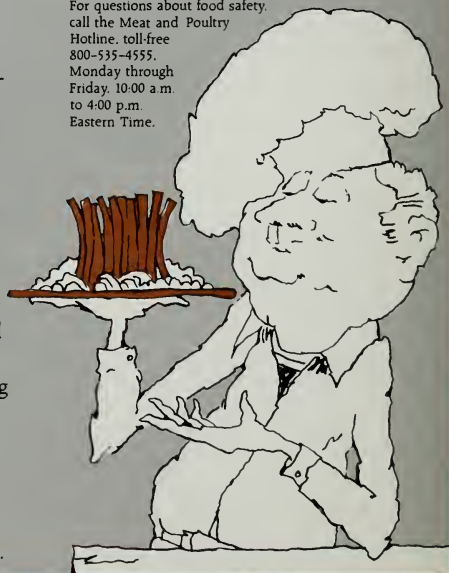
**A:** The caterer should prepare a number of platters and dishes of each food to be served. The back-up plates should be either refrigerated or kept in the oven prior to serving. When two hours have elapsed or when the platters are empty, they should be removed and replaced with fresh, full trays. It is unsafe to add new food to a serving dish that has already sat out at room temperature over two hours.

**Q:** What will be done with the leftovers?

**A:** If the food has been safely prepared and held at safe temperatures throughout the party, it should be safe to enjoy again later. Generally, divide leftovers into smaller portions for quick freezing. Use anything you plan to refrigerate within 1-2 days. Thoroughly reheat before serving anything to be served hot. If there's *any* doubt about how safe the leftovers are, throw them out.

—Susan Templin and  
Laura Fox

For questions about food safety, call the Meat and Poultry Hotline, toll-free 800-535-4555, Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time.







# The Consumer's Almanac



Highlighting Winter Food Events

<b>Event</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Contact</b>
<b>National Pretzel Month</b> October 1-31	Celebrate one of the world's oldest snacks. Recipes for everything from granola to chicken-stuffed pretzels are available.	Wendy Phillips National Pretzel Baker's Institute Box 1433 800 New Holland Ave. Lancaster, Pa. 17603 (717) 394-3108
<b>National Pasta Month</b> October 1-31	Pasta recipes for singles and families are available.	Helen Sullivan National Pasta Association 1901 N. Ft. Meyer Dr. Suite 1000 Arlington, Va. 22209 (202) 333-0700
<b>National Apple Month</b> October 1-31	Explore the world of apples through these new recipes.	Judith Trujillo International Apple Institute P.O. Box 1137 McLean, Va. 22101 (703) 442-8850
<b>International Rice Festival</b> Crowley, La. October 17-18	Enter the rice eating or Creole cooking contests. See the grand parade and enjoy the music.	Bill Williams International Rice Festival P.O. Box 1900 Crowley, La. 70527 (318) 783-8728
<b>World's Championship Chili Cook-Off</b> Rosamond, Ca. October 26	Chili lovers from across the nation, Canada, Mexico, and England see who makes the best bowl of red chili. The winning recipe available after the contest.	Jim West International Chili Society Box 2966 Newport Beach, Ca. 92663 (714) 631-1780
<b>Louisiana Pecan Festival</b> Colfax, La. November 7-8	"Frontier Days" with log benches, Daniel Boone costumes, pecans, smoked sausage sandwiches, a kiddie rodeo and more along the Red River.	June Ingalls Louisiana Pecan Festival Box 78 Colfax, La. 71417 (318) 627-5196

—Richard Bryant

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