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**Holiday Hosting: Get kitchen ready, says K-State food scientist**

Blakeslee encourages people to make a holiday entertainment plan now

*By Lisa Moser, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Now that Halloween is here, many folks are already thinking about holiday entertaining for Thanksgiving.

After two years of limited celebrations, some families are looking to bring back traditional large group gatherings, making this the perfect time to make sure the kitchen is ready, said food scientist Karen Blakeslee, who is also coordinator of the Rapid Response Center at Kansas State University.

“First, examine your kitchen equipment and make sure your appliances are working right,” Blakeslee said.

She recommends that people place an oven thermometer inside their oven.

“The oven thermometer will give you a better idea of the actual oven temperature so that you can be assured the food is baked properly,” Blakeslee said.

Also with small appliances, she encouraged cooks to test them now to make sure they work correctly and that there is enough space in the kitchen to use them when preparing the full Thanksgiving meal.

“Check to make sure your kitchen has the electrical power to handle all the appliances you’ll need to run when cooking,” Blakeslee said.

To help with the space challenges of holiday meal prep, Blakeslee said cooks should prepare and freeze items ahead of time.

“If you are going to have dinner rolls, make them now and then wrap them tightly and place them in the freezer. Then on the day of the meal, pop them in the microwave to warm them up,” Blakeslee said.

She said baked goods begin to go stale as they come through the cooling process. Reheating them from the freezer reverses that process and freshens them up.
“Fruit pies, baked or unbaked, will survive better in the freezer than other types of pies,” Blakeslee said. “Again, it is a good idea to refresh them in the oven after thawing.”

To help with the demands on the oven, Blakeslee advises families divide up the holiday meal cooking.

“One suggestion is for the host to make the main course and then have everyone else bring a side dish,” she said.

After the meal is complete, it is important to keep the two-hour food safety rule in mind.

“Don’t let hot or cold food sit at room temperature for more than two hours, otherwise food will be in the temperature danger zone between 40 and 140 degrees where bacteria really thrive,” Blakeslee said.

**Turkey Tips**

When preparing a holiday turkey, Blakeslee shared the following tips:

- Ideally, frozen turkeys should be thawed in the refrigerator, estimating 24 hours of thaw time for every four to five pounds. She suggests adding one or two extra days to be sure it is thawed.
- If thawing turkey in cold water, the bird must be submerged. Change water every 30 minutes. Plan on a minimum thawing time of 30 minutes per pound of turkey.
- Do not rinse the turkey before putting it in the oven. It is unnecessary and risks spreading contamination in the kitchen.
- Use a food thermometer to check the turkey and make sure it is registering at 165 degrees. Check the temperature in several locations such as the thickest part of the breast and the innermost part of the thigh and wing.
- It is best to let the cooked turkey rest for 10-20 minutes to allow the juices to circulate for a better moisture level and flavor.

More cooking and food safety tips are available online from the K-State Rapid Response Center.

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K-State Rapid, Response Center, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/

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