

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Nov 15, 2012

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Advance Preparations – Safely!

With all the holiday and end of year festivities rapidly approaching, a lot of cooks are beginning to think about what can be done in advance. Can I make the casserole and bake it later? How long will the salad last in the refrigerator? When should I start thawing the turkey? When should I start cooking the turkey? Take a deep breath, it can all be managed. But do it safely.

If apple salads or apple pies are on your menu, can you peel the fruit the day before you make the salad? Yes you can, if you keep the fruit refrigerated. The best way to keep apples and pears looking sparkling white until you add them to a salad is to raid your vitamin stash. Lemon juice will help. Fruit Fresh® will help. But the active ingredient in both of those is vitamin C. So, crush as many vitamin C tablets as it takes to make 1500 mg. If your tablets are 500 mg each, that means 3 tablets. (500 x 3=1500) Dissolve the vitamin in 2 quarts of cold water in a bowl. Then drop the fruit into the cold water as you peel it. If you have to keep it until tomorrow, refrigerate the whole bowl. It will stay nice and white for a beautiful salad.

What about those casseroles? How far in advance can they be prepared? The casseroles and mixed dishes we worry about the most are those that contain raw eggs. The USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service recommends that dishes containing raw eggs with other ingredients be cooked immediately, or that they be kept refrigerated for no more than 24 hours before cooking.

Casseroles with eggs must be cooked to 160°F in the middle to be safe. Use a food thermometer – no guessing! This includes egg-based pies such as pumpkin. If you have leftovers, or bake a dish in advance and then reheat it, it must be reheated to 165°F to be sure that there are no surviving bacteria. If you need to refrigerate a baked casserole or warm leftovers containing eggs set the dish in a pan of ice water to chill quickly. Even in the refrigerator it might take too long to cool to below 40°F, the safe temperature.

Then there are all those questions about the turkey! You need to buy about 1 pound of whole turkey for each person, so if you're serving 10 people you'll need a 10 pound bird. If you want leftovers, you'll need a larger bird. If you have or intend to buy a frozen turkey, get it soon. There are only 3 ways to safely thaw a frozen turkey, and in the refrigerator is the best. But a frozen 20 pound turkey will take 6 days to thaw in the refrigerator! A 12 pound turkey will take 3 or 4 days to thaw.

A quicker, but not fast, way to safely thaw the turkey is in cold water. That 12 pound bird will need about 6 hours to thaw, the 20 pounder will need 10 to 12 hours. Keep the turkey sealed in its plastic, or seal it inside 2 plastic bags. The best way is to arrange the water so that it is continuously running into and out of the container that has the turkey. If you can't manage that then you must change the water at least every half hour. The water must stay cold to ensure that no bacteria on the skin of the bird get warm enough to grow while the insides are still thawing.

If you are absolutely down to the last minute you can thaw a turkey in the microwave. But you must then cook it immediately. Do not put it back in the refrigerator to cook later. Or, put it frozen in the oven and roast it directly. It will take half again as

long to cook as a thawed turkey. And remember to remove the giblets when you can.

It's safest, and quickest, to roast a turkey unstuffed and bake the dressing in a separate dish. An 8 to 12 pound, unstuffed turkey will need about 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 3 hours in an oven at 325°F. That 20 pound monster will need 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 hours. Again, use a thermometer to be sure the thickest meat in the breast and thigh has reached 165°F. At that temperature it will be safely done and juicy but not overdone and dry. Let it sit for 10-15 minutes after it comes out of the oven so it will be easy to carve.

Here's a meat loaf to make and freeze for easy preparation in the future. Serve with salad and potatoes. Enjoy!

Fixed and Frozen Meat Loaf

2 eggs, slightly beaten

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup ketchup

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup mild barbeque sauce

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water

1 pkg (1.5 oz) onion soup mix

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup soft bread crumbs

2 lbs lean ground beef

Beat eggs lightly in bowl. Add ketchup, sauce, water, soup mix and bread and mix. Mix into beef in large bowl. Shape into loaf. Wrap in freezer paper or waxed paper, then seal in freezer-weight plastic bag. Label and date. To cook, put frozen loaf in shallow baking dish and bake at 450°F for 45 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°F and bake 15 minutes longer. Transfer to serving dish while you make gravy from the juices. Serves 6-8.