

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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As hot as it's been recently, cooking outside is one way to keep some of the heat out of the kitchen. You can stand the humidity outside long enough to fire up the grill, drop the meat on it, and check it a few times, while spending most of your time comfortably inside. Just make sure the basic food safety principles don't get charred in the process.

When you shop for meat, seafood or dairy, put it in your grocery cart last. Then take that bag out of the hot car and into the kitchen first. The less time these protein foods have in the summer heat, the less chance there is for bacteria to grow. You need to aim for less than 2 hours of total time at room temperature. If you start with frozen meats, thaw them in the refrigerator, not on the counter. Yes, you'll need to plan ahead and start thawing the day before you cook, but better that than food poisoning, right? If you really need to speed things up, use the microwave but be sure to cook the food immediately, as soon as it's thawed.

Marinades can add a lot of flavor to meats. They also help prevent the production of certain carcinogens if you get distracted and the meat is overcooked. Dense meats like beef and pork can usually be marinated for up to 5 days. Softer poultry is better not marinated more than 3 days. The acid (fruit juice, vinegar) and the oil in the marinade will do most tenderizing and add flavor. Herbs and spices also add flavor. But be careful of marinades either bottled or home-made that contain a lot of salt. They'll raise your blood pressure as well as the flavor. If you want some

marinade for sauce set it aside before you add the meat, or boil it hard before serving.

Pre-flavored and seasoned meats have had water, salt and seasonings injected into the muscle. Read labels. You could be surprised at how much more sodium there is. Besides adding flavor, injecting water adds weight to the meat. You just paid a lot more for the water in there. Buy plain meat and add your own seasoning.

Another way to reduce the possibility of making carcinogens on the grill is to partially precook meats. The cancer-causing chemicals are formed when meat becomes very dark or charred. By cooking the meat first on the stove, in the oven or microwave we only need the grill to add the final flavors. Precooking also makes it easier to avoid having underdone spots in thick pieces or over cool spots on the grill. Just be sure that when you precook it the meat goes directly from the stove to the grill. Don't refrigerate it or leave it sit before you've finished cooking it completely.

One last and very important step is to dig that food thermometer out of the back of the drawer, clean it off, and use it! It is impossible to tell by looking or cutting into it whether meat or poultry has been cooked enough to kill the bacteria that probably were there. Hamburgers can be completely brown and still cool enough to have live bacteria. They can also still be pink and yet be overdone and dry. So use a thermometer to be sure you're safe. A digital thermometer only need to have the tip in the meat for an accurate reading, it won't poke a big hole in the meat.

Ground beef has to reach a temperature of 160°F to be safe. Steaks and roasts are done enough to be safe at just 145°F. Pork, chops and roast, needs 160°F. They can still be pink inside, still be nice and juicy at that temperature. But they'll be safe! Poultry, whether it's a rack of drumsticks or half a chicken, should reach 165°F in the

thickest part of the meat. Put the thermometer where it's not touching a bone.

Finally, make sure you use a clean plate to carry that safely cooked meat in to the table of hungry family. Don't put cooked meat back on the same juicy plate that carried the raw meat to the grill. You'll just contaminate it all over again. Yuck!

Here's a sweet and spicy chicken that you can start in the microwave then finish on the grill. Serve it with a brown rice salad and stir-fry veggies that you steamed or micro-waved.

Fruity Spiced Chicken

1 pound boneless chicken breasts, or 3 pound bone-in chicken pieces

1 tsp grated fresh ginger ½ C apricot jam or fruit spread

2 Tbsp rice wine vinegar 1 tsp crushed red pepper flakes

1 tsp olive oil black pepper to taste

Place chicken on microwave-able dish, cover lightly and cook on high 15 - 17 minutes.

Preheat grill. If oven does not have a turntable rotate dish once or twice during cooking.

Combine other ingredients in small bowl. Use a brush or spoon to spread apricot glaze

over chicken pieces. Transfer to heated grill and finish cooking another 5 minutes or

until thermometer inserted into thickest part of meat reads 165°F. Serves 4.