

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.

Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

### Handling Food Gifts

Thousands of Americans will have received gifts of food this Christmas. From fudge to fruit, hams, cheese and cakes, they all arrive delivered to our doorstep. If you were one of the lucky households, how long will they last? Some items, such as the fudge and cookies, probably won't make it past the middle of next week. They'll be devoured! But what if you received 5 jars of home made jelly, 2 pounds of cheese and several summer sausages? You're not as likely to get those all eaten in the next week. So where do you store them and how long will they last?

Some things are made to last, almost forever. Don't worry about the jams and jellies unless they're only covered with paraffin. If they've been sealed with canning lids they will keep indefinitely on the shelf. Refrigerate them once they're open. They'll still keep for a month or longer. Any that have paraffin should probably be refrigerated now. Paraffin is no longer recommended for sealing jars because it tends to crack away from the glass. Once it's not tightly sealed onto the jar the food is an open restaurant for whatever happens to float past.

If you do find, now or months from now, mold on any jams or jellies, discard that whole jarful. Molds toxins in the jam can dissolve their way through the whole jarful even though the mold is sitting on the top. Small doses of these toxins over time are known to cause cancers in lab animals, so don't risk it.

Sealed packages of meats, cheeses and fish should have storage instructions on the label. If you open a box to see that it says 'Keep Refrigerated', but it has been sitting under the tree for the last 3 days, don't take a chance. Discard the food! Thank the giver anyway. They don't need to know what happened, but you need to stay safe.

Large packages of hard cheese can be divided and refrigerated for up to a month, or frozen for several months. It's best to divide the blocks into smaller quantities so you only have to keep one open at a time. Wrap each piece tightly in freezer-weight plastic wrap. You can also seal it in plastic bags or wrap with foil. You want to keep as much air out as possible.

Hard cheeses that are frozen will be crumbly when they are thawed. They'll still be great for cooking, but you'll have a hard time using them for sandwiches. If they get a spot of mold they can be trimmed. Cut away at least an inch on all sides of the spot.

Soft cheese (like Camembert), cream cheese and other soft dairy products don't freeze well at all. The recommended storage time for them in the refrigerator is only 1 week. So eat them first, or re-gift them to someone else who can use them.

Some smoked fish is vacuum packed and able to last on the shelf for weeks or months. It will gradually lose its texture, and the flavor will degrade. This is due to the effect of salt and smoke on fat. It won't necessarily make you sick, but it won't be good.

Soft spreadable smoked fish should be refrigerated. Because it is so moist it is very susceptible to spoiling. The recommended safe storage time for this is only 1 to 3 days. Have another party to get it eaten quickly! It doesn't freeze well either.

Baked goods are the least of your worries. Cookies, breads, cakes, most pies and yes, even fruitcake, will keep well in the freezer. Cream-based pies will have the shortest storage life, and may weep when they are thawed. Just wrap things well, seal them tightly, and be sure to label everything!

Here's a way to use up the last of the leftover turkey as well as some of the vegetables from yesterday. If you have leftover cornbread, cube and toast it for croutons on top. May your holidays be joyful, happy and healthy!

#### Creamy Turkey Corn Chowder

1 Tbsp oil	2 cups chopped cooked turkey
1 cup chopped celery	½ cup chopped onion
3 Tbsp all purpose flour	3 cups chicken broth
2 cups diced red potatoes (unpeeled)	½ cup creamed corn
½ cup whole kernel corn	½ cup evaporated milk
¾ cup dried cranberries	2 Tbsp poultry seasoning

Parsley or cooked crumbled bacon for garnishes if desired

Heat oil in large pot. Add celery and onion, cook and stir until tender. Add turkey and cook until warmed. Sprinkle flour over mixture and stir 1 minute longer. Gradually stir in broth, stirring constantly until no lumps remain. Add corns and potatoes, bring to boil and simmer about 30 minutes. Stir in milk, cranberries and poultry seasoning. Cook but do not boil while stirring 2 minutes longer. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve with parsley, bacon and/or cornbread croutons for garnish. Serves 4-6.

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