



NEWS RELEASE

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Give the Gift of Food Safety

This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) suggests placing food safety gifts on your holiday shopping list. Keeping your loved ones safe may be the best gift of all. There are a number of helpful kitchen devices available in stores and catalogs that will interest every person and one size will fit all levels of cooking skills.

Programmable slow cookers are a new addition to the tabletop appliance line. Slow cookers heat food slowly at a low temperature -- usually between 170 and 280°F. The low, moist heat helps less expensive, leaner cuts of meat become tender. The variety of temperature levels and cooking times allows you to cook your meal and then keep it warm without overcooking, even if you're running late.

Insulated carrying cases make great gifts for transporting either hot or cold perishables. The insulated carriers come in various sizes and keep food at a safe temperature for approximately one hour.

A **food thermometer** is perfect for a stocking stuffer. Monitoring the internal temperature of meat and poultry can be a learning experience for cooks of all ages to ensure that their food is safe and not undercooked.

"Using a food thermometer is the only way to tell if food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy harmful bacteria," said Dr. Elsa Murano, USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety.

Today's food thermometers are user-friendly and come in various types.

- Instant-read thermometers come in dial and digital. These are used after removing your food from the oven and give the temperature in a matter of seconds.
- Disposable temperature indicators are intended for one-time use and are handy for grilling or checking foods cooked away from home.
- Large dial thermometers, like a lot of people use with turkeys, are oven safe and remain in the meat while it's cooking so you can monitor its progress.
- Digital thermometers are a great gift for people fond of electronic devices. One type is a digital probe that is inserted into the meat and attached to a long wire that connects to a base unit outside the oven. It allows you to monitor the temperature while the meat is cooking. You set the desired temperature and the unit beeps when it reaches that temperature.

USDA recommends that for safety, beef, veal or lamb (roasts, steaks and chops) be cooked to an internal temperature of 145°F for medium rare and 160°F for medium. Fresh pork should reach 160°F. Whole poultry should reach 180°F, as measured in the thigh. Ground beef, veal and lamb should be cooked to 160°F; ground poultry to 165°F.

Color-coded cutting boards are great for preventing cross-contamination of foods. Dedicate some colors for cutting raw meat, poultry and fish, and different colors for cutting ready-to-eat foods such as salad ingredients, cooked meat and breads. These polyethylene plastic boards can be put into the dishwasher for sanitizing. Non-porous surfaces, such as plastic and tempered glass, are easier to clean than wood.

Chafing dishes or **food warmers** are great gifts for party givers. Perishable foods left out at room temperature can become unsafe after more than 2 hours; and 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F. Keeping hot food hot (140°F or higher) in a dish with a heat source can prevent guests from getting food borne illness.

A larger, useful appliance is an **electric roaster oven**. This tabletop electric cooker serves as an extra oven for cooking foods such as a turkey or large roast. Generally the cooking time and temperature setting are the same as for a conventional oven.

For the harried food handler, a **kitchen timer** makes a nifty little gift. Not only can it be used to remind cooks to check if something is done, it can also be used to remind cooks to put food away. The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline receives numerous calls from cooks who left food out to cool on the counter, only to discover it still sitting there the next morning. Perishable food is not safe if left out more than 2 hours; 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F.

Source: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/news/2003/gifts.htm>