



Holiday Tips

From Families & Health Agent Kerri Wade:

- Food safety is important when it comes to holiday buffets. To keep food warm for a buffet, use slow cookers on warm or low settings. To keep perishable foods cold nestle the serving trays in a bed of ice. Drain off the water as it melts and refresh with more ice. Food that is not iced or in a slow cooker should be kept out no longer than 2 hours.
- When feeding large groups, a ham or turkey is an economical choice. You can cook the turkey ahead of time, slice and refrigerate it for a buffet – serving it hot or cold. Ham can also be cooked ahead of time or you can purchase a precooked ham and serve it cold or hot.
- Don't overwork your refrigerator. A refrigerator is meant to keep foods cold, not to get them cold. Before placing large amounts of warm items in the refrigerator, first cool them by setting the containers in an ice bath.
- Many grocery stores will run specials this time of year. Look for the sales and avoid marked up items.
- When entertaining, make a budget and a time table – then stick to it. Prepare as much food ahead of time leaving only the last minute items to do when guests arrive. Ask early arrivers to pitch in and help prepare last minute food items or set the table. This makes guests feel helpful and makes the work load easier on the host.
- To avoid the urge to overeat during parties, eat a healthy snack prior to attending. When filling your plate at the party try to have half of your food be fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid congregating at the food table – it will tempt you to eat more. Make a plate and move away.
- Watch what you drink. Many holiday beverages are loaded with calories. Water with a lemon or lime slice can be refreshing and adds zero calories.
- If children will be visiting your house over the holidays, be prepared with healthy food items they enjoy, such as: 100% real juice, carrot and celery sticks with low fat ranch dressing, or fresh fruit such as apple slices and bananas.

From 4-H Youth Development Agent Sherry Swint:

- In the hectic days before Christmas, enlist the children to help you:
 - Have them help hang decorations on the tree.
 - Let them help with making holiday favorites in the kitchen.
 - Let them wrap gifts.

Youth want to learn how to be competent adults. Allowing them to help you not only aids you but also builds their confidence so that they too can be useful and help the family. Think of all the joyful memories you will make together.

- The holiday break from school is a wonderful opportunity for kids to explore their imaginations. After all the wrappings and gifts are done...send the kids outside. Go along with the kids and have a great time exploring the outdoors, make snow people, and after making a snow fort enjoy a round of snowball throwing. Outside is to be enjoyed by families and afterwards the hot chocolate and marshmallows are so much sweeter. If it isn't snowing, go to your favorite neighborhood park and let the children learn how to ride that new bike or go on a family hike.
- Traveling somewhere? Forget the portable DVD and MP3 players and let the children be creative. Teach them road trip games – remember looking for a license plate from every state, finding letters of the alphabet on road signs, or looking for Volkswagen Beetles? Take a box, fill it with paper, crayons, magic markers and stickers that you already have around the house and wrap it up. Let the kids when they are finished with the road games, open it. The old is new again. Encourage the children to write a story or make cards for those you are traveling for.

From Agriculture & Natural Resources Agent John Porter:

- Nothing says holidays like fresh garland, swags and centerpieces, made with fresh live evergreen and holly boughs. These items can be expensive in the store, but are easily made at home with trimming from yours or your friend's yards. Holly bushes, spruce trees and fir trees can all be safely pruned in the winter, so damage to those will be minimal. You may wish to avoid taking cuttings of pine, juniper or yew, as they can suffer winter damage when pruned in the fall or winter.
- This year, 31 percent of American households plan to purchase a live Christmas tree for their holiday celebrations. When selecting a live tree, gently tap it on the ground; fresh trees should lose few needles when tapped. When you get your tree home, make a ½ inch cut to the bottom of the trunk and put it in fresh water in a reservoir-type tree stand. Make sure you keep the tree well watered throughout the season. For more tips, visit www.christmastree.org/treecare.pdf.

- Holiday plants are an excellent way to decorate your home, office or other space. Make sure that they are in a warm place with at least some sun or light and that you keep them well watered. While they are a safe addition to the holiday display, poinsettias may cause stomach upset if leaves are ingested or skin irritation if the sap from the stems makes contact with the skin. They are not poisonous, as has been rumored, but can cause mild irritation.
- Having a hard time finding gifts for those hard-to-shop-for friends and family? Consider purchasing locally grown and produced food items such as jams, jellies, honey, molasses, salsas, or beeswax candles. These make especially nice gifts for out of state relatives since you share a bit of home with them. They also support the local economy and local farmers.

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