

Keep It Hot, Keep It Safe: Your Guide to Grill & Food Safety This Summer

As temperatures rise and summer gatherings begin, grilling becomes a staple of backyard get-togethers, holiday celebrations, and outdoor fun. While grilling brings people together and adds flavor to the season, it also comes with potential risks—both in fire hazards and foodborne illness. Whether you're a seasoned grill master or a weekend BBQ warrior, following basic grill and food safety guidelines is key to keeping your family and guests safe.

Grilling Safety: Avoiding Fires and Burns

1. Grill in a Safe Location

- Always grill outdoors, in a well-ventilated area.
- Keep your grill at least 10 feet away from your home, deck railings, and overhanging branches.

2. Check Your Equipment

- **Gas grills:** Check the hose for leaks or blockages before lighting.
- **Charcoal grills:** Use only charcoal starter fluid and never add more fluid once the fire has started.

3. Never Leave the Grill Unattended

- Keep children and pets at least 3 feet away from the grill area.
- Have a fire extinguisher, baking soda, or a bucket of sand nearby in case of flare-ups.

4. Cool Down Properly

- Let the coals completely cool before disposing of them in a metal container.
- Turn off the gas supply and burners when finished using a gas grill.

Food Safety: Don't Let Bacteria Crash the BBQ

According to the CDC, foodborne illness increases during the summer months due to warmer temperatures and more frequent outdoor eating. Here's how to serve up a safe and delicious meal:

1. Clean: Start Fresh

- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat.
- Clean all utensils, cutting boards, and surfaces with hot, soapy water.

2. Separate: Avoid Cross-Contamination

- Use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- Never reuse marinades that were used with raw meat unless they've been boiled.

3. Cook: Use a Food Thermometer

Don't rely on color alone, use a thermometer to ensure safe internal temperatures:

- **Poultry:** 165°F
- **Ground beef:** 160°F
- **Steaks, pork, fish:** 145°F (with a 3-minute rest time)

4. Chill: Keep It Cold

- Keep cold foods below 40°F using coolers with ice packs.
- Refrigerate the leftovers within 2 hours (or 1 hour if it's above 90°F outside).

Grilling Tips for Flavor and Fun

- Grill vegetables and fruits for healthy and colorful side dishes.
- Try foil packets for easy, mess-free cooking.
- Always preheat your grill to kill off any bacteria from previous uses.

Grilling is one of summer's great pleasures—but it's important to respect both fire and food safety practices. By keeping these tips in mind, you can ensure your cookouts are memorable for all the right reasons.

Stay safe, eat well, and enjoy the season!