Preparing food for your upcoming barbecue, picnic or beach day? Don’t forget food and water safety!
Summer is here! It is time to hit the beach, relax in the park and of course enjoy your favorite foods outdoors with your friends and loved ones. While we are enjoying the sunshine, germs around us are also enjoying their time in this hot weather, particularly on our favorite foods. A small error in handling food and water in this hot weather can get you or your loved ones sick. Stay healthy by following the food safety tips below!

SAFETY TIPS FOR ALL OUTDOOR OCCASIONS

Hand Washing: We often neglect washing our hands when we are at the park or beach. Always wash your hands with soap and water before, during and after cooking or eating to reduce risk of food borne illness. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if there is no running water available.
Clean and Cool Cooler: Before putting everything in your cooler, sanitize it with a bleach solution to kill any bacteria that can grow in hot temperatures. Pack food in the cooler about three quarters full, reserving one quarter of the space for ice packs. Carry a thermometer in the cooler and add more ice if the temperature goes above 40°F. When you are heading to the beach or park, keep coolers in the back seat of your car instead of the hot trunk. When you arrive, find a shady spot for your cooler and remember not to leave food sitting under the sun for longer than two hours, or one hour when the temperature is above 90°F.
Color-coded Utensils: Prevent cross-contamination by using separate sets of utensils such as tongs, knives and forks when handling raw foods and cooked foods. Ideally, use color-coded ones so they are easier to distinguish.

BARBECUE DAY
Clean Grill: Whether you are using your own grill or one provided in the outdoors, scrub it with hot, soapy water before each use.
Thaw and Marinate Raw Meat: Thaw meat in the fridge or microwave, not under the sun or by the grill. Marinate meat in the fridge and reuse the marinade only it has been boiled.
Separate Raw from Ready-To-Eat: Tightly seal raw or thawed meat in plastic wrap for transport to prevent juices from contaminating other food. Ideally, pack raw meat and ready-to-eat food in separate coolers.
Grilling: Remove from the cooler only the amount of raw meat that will fit on the grill. Cook hamburgers, sausages and chicken breasts to 165°F. Bring a meat thermometer to ensure foods are safe to eat. Never partially grill meat or poultry to finish cooking later.
Leftovers: Store your leftovers in shallow, airtight containers and do not keep your grilled leftovers in the fridge for more than three to four days.

PICNIC DAY
Fruits and Vegetables: Running water might be hard to find outdoors. Wash your fruits and vegetables in advance, even you are planning to peel them.
Clean Totes and Lunch Boxes: You might not need a cooler to enjoy a picnic in the park, but clean your totes and lunch boxes with warm, soapy water before packing your food.

BEACH DAY
Beverages: Consider using a separate cooler for beverages and perishable food since we tend to drink more at the beach and frequently open and shut the beverage cooler, which allows the cool air to escape.

Water Safety!
Stay hydrated in hot weather but make sure you use safe water for drinking.
Tap Water: If your CD4 count is 200 or below, boil tap water for 1 minute or filter water using a NSF certified water filter before drinking.
Ice: Use safe bottled water to make ice or boil water for at least 1 minute before making ice. Pack the ice in a separate sealed bag for your outdoor beverages.
Seltzer water: Good safe option to maintain hydration and if you want something fizzy outdoors. Add sliced lemon, lime or mint for more flavor.
Bottled Water: Choose bottled water that is appropriately filtered for harmful bacteria. Check out the list below:

Safe to Drink Brands:
Dasani/Purified
Calistoga/Drinking
Crystal Geyser/Spring
Palomar Mountain/Spring
Poland Springs/Spring
Ralph’s/Distilled
Sparkletts/Distilled and Spring
Vons/Albertson’s

Not Safe to Drink Brands:
Evian Spring Water
Fiji Natural Artesian water
Naya Spring Water; Perrier
San Pellegrino; Saratoga, Vittel
Vegetable of the Quarter: Okra

Originating from West Africa and South Asia, Okra (also known as gumbo) loves hot weather. It is in season between June and November. This plant belongs to the same family of cotton and hibiscus.

Healthy benefits: Okra is an excellent source of valuable nutrients. The slimy substance inside the pods contains soluble fiber that helps to lower cholesterol, reducing the risk of heart disease. The rest of the pods contain insoluble fiber that helps food pass more quickly through the stomach and intestines, relieving constipation and decreasing risk of colorectal cancer. Okra is packed with vitamins A, C and K, calcium and potassium. The seeds and pulp contain antioxidants such as quercetin, catechin, procyanidin B1 & B2, and rutin to help improve immunity and fight off free radicals that damage our cells.

How to select: Choose okra that is bright green, smooth and unblemished. It is normal for the stem end and area around to look a bit brown but avoid okra with significant brown spots and dry looking ends. The brighter and greener the ends are, the fresher the okra. Most of the okra range between 1 and 4 inches long. Okra longer than 4 inches tends to be tougher to chew which is best used for stews and gumbos.

How to store: Store fresh okra dry and loosely wrapped in a plastic bag in the fridge. Use fresh okra soon after buying since it can only keep for two to three days. For longer storage, blanch the whole okra for 3 minutes, cool down the okra in an ice water bath for 5 minutes then freeze them. Blanching is necessary for longer storage to preserve the color, flavor and nutrients.

How to cook: Okra is best eaten fresh. Frozen, pickled and canned okra are also available. Okra chips are gaining popularity. Okra pairs well with eggplants, tomatoes, onion, corn, shellfish and fish stock. Simply stir-fry, grill, steam, roast, and best of all, cook them in soups, stews and curries. The slime released from the pods serves as a thickener. Try to add okra to your favorite stew for thickening instead of adding cornstarch which adds unnecessary calories. Add some lemon juice if you don’t like the sliminess of okra.

How to prepare: Okra, beans and summer vegetable sauté
Serve 6
Ingredients:
1 tablespoon canola oil
1/2 cup chopped green onions (about 4)
1 garlic clove, minced
1 cup sliced fresh okra (about 4 ounces)
1 cup chopped red bell pepper (about 1)
1 finely chopped seeded jalapeño pepper
1/2 (15-ounce) can of corn kernels, rinsed and drained
1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
1/3 cup minced fresh cilantro
Salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:
Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté onions and garlic for 1 minute. Add okra and sauté 3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium. Add bell pepper and jalapeño and cook 5 minutes. Add corn and cook 5 minutes. Stir in beans and cook 2 minutes. Stir in cilantro. Enjoy!

Adapted from http://www.myrecipes.com/recipe/corn-summer-vegetable-saut-10000001622502/

Herb of the Quarter: Turmeric

Turmeric is a deep orange root that looks like ginger. Turmeric is widely used as a spice in a lot of eastern dishes and is a necessary ingredient in curry powder. Because of its custard yellow color, turmeric is also used in mustard and to color butter and cheese.

Turmeric has been used in traditional medicines for 4000 years as an anti-inflammatory aid, to treat digestive and liver problems, skin diseases, and wounds. Research has found that turmeric is packed with curcumin, a powerful antioxidant that scavenges free radicals on your damaged cells. Scientists found that curcumin can kill cancer cells in laboratory dishes and shrink animal tumors.

Turmeric is mildly aromatic, with the scent of ginger and a pungent flavor. Though human studies are underway to prove its effectiveness, don’t miss its antioxidants. Use turmeric to flavor your dishes and cut down on sodium or added sugar. Use it to sauté vegetable or meat dishes, add color to rice, drizzle in fruit smoothies. Prepare a simple turmeric tea by steeping ¼ teaspoon of ground turmeric in hot water for 5 minutes or longer then add honey to taste.