



Question of the Week

Q: I hosted my annual holiday party and have lots of leftovers. What should I do with all the food?

A: First, determine if your leftovers are safe to eat. Remember the two-hour rule. Foods shouldn't sit out at room temperature for more than two hours. If you have kept hot foods hot, 140°F or above, and cold foods cold, 40°F or below, then your leftovers should be safe. If they have been sitting on the buffet table at room temperature for more than two hours, discard them. To store foods, place cooked foods into shallow containers and store in the refrigerator or freezer. Dividing foods into smaller portions promotes rapid, even cooling. The refrigerator temperature should be 40°F, and the freezer should be 0°F. Check temperatures with a refrigerator/freezer thermometer. Avoid over-packing the refrigerator or freezer. Air needs to circulate around food to keep it cold.

Date leftovers so they can be used within a safe time. Most leftovers should be used within three to five days. For longer storage, meat, poultry, casseroles, and most vegetable, rice and pasta dishes can be frozen. These foods will keep their best quality for three or four months. For more food storage information, go to www.fmi.org/consumer/foodkeeper/brochure.cfm.

Reheat hot foods to 165°F. Before reheating, check leftovers for spoilage. If food looks or smells suspicious, throw it out. Remember, *if in doubt, throw it out*.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu