

Food Safety Tips Perfect for Spring

K-State food safety specialist explains how to pick the best produce and prepare a safe picnic

By Taylor Jamison, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Spring and summer are ripe for enjoying fresh fruit and vegetables and planning outdoor picnics, but food safety mistakes could spoil the fun, said Kansas State University food safety specialist Londa Nwadike.

She said that food safety begins before the kitchen; all the way back to production, in fact. “Produce safety is a shared responsibility. Kansas produce growers are working hard to grow produce safely,” said Nwadike, who holds dual extension appointments with K-State and the University of Missouri. “K-State Research and Extension provides resources to grow produce safely, and consumers can also do their part to keep produce as safe as possible.”

Nwadike said there are a few things to keep in mind to assure the produce is safe and good quality in the grocery store, farmers market, or farm stand:

- The product should have a fresh look ideally, not wilted.
- The product should be without bruises, cuts or nicks.
- If pre-cut or peeled, the product must be in cold storage.
- Do not buy any produce that is touching the floor.

When preparing produce in the kitchen, Nwadike advises consumers to “always keep hands and surfaces clean” and store produce in the refrigerator until ready to prepare. “We only recommend that consumers use clean running water to rinse produce before consuming it,” she said. “For produce with rough skin, such as cantaloupe or potatoes, it is recommended to use a clean brush.”

For further tips on produce preparation, K-State Research and Extension offers several resources online, including a publication on Storing Fresh Produce.

Anytime, but especially during picnics, Nwadike said cut or peeled produce should not be kept in the temperature danger zone of 40-140°F for more than 2 hours. That is, cold foods should be kept cold, and hot foods should be kept hot. “If the produce might be out for more than two hours from the time you cut it or take it out of the refrigerator, be sure to pack the cut produce in a cooler on ice so that it stays below 40°F,” she said. “It will also taste better that way.”

The usual food safety rules also apply at the picnic: wash hands and keep any surface that the produce touches – containers, utensils and more – clean. “If you are outside, keep things covered to keep animals and insects away from the produce,” Nwadike said.

K-State Research and Extension offers many other resources and programs for consumers.

- For low-income individuals, free food preparation classes are offered through SNAP-Ed.

For general consumers, there are a list of food safety-related topics available on the K-State Research and Extension food safety website.

