

Food safety should be a concern for every cook

Food safety is a big concern. It has always been a concern for those of us in the food-service industry, however, the public seems to be more interested in the subject these days.

But, at the same time as there seems to be a fever-pitch (pun intended) of cleanliness going on, in terms of anti-bacterial soaps, anti-bacterial sprays, disinfectants for everything— from your head of broccoli to your door knobs. There is also medical research coming forth telling us that we are too clean. By wiping our worlds down with soaps, sprays and cleansers, we are actually causing a decrease in our ability to fend off illnesses because our immune system becomes compromised.

So, what do we do? Well, knowledge is the key.

There are four different kinds of bacteria as far as the food world is concerned. There are harmless bacteria— most bacteria fall into this category. They are neither helpful nor harmful to us. They are not a concern as far as food sanitation goes.

There are beneficial bacteria— these bacteria are helpful to us. For example, many live in the intestinal tract, where they fight harmful bacteria, aid in the digestion of food and produce certain nutrients. In food production, bacteria make possible the manufacture of many foods including cheese, yogurt and sauerkraut.

There are undesirable bacteria— these are the bacteria that are responsible for food spoilage. They cause souring, putrefying and decomposition. These bacteria may or may not cause disease, but they have a built-in safety factor: they announce their presence by means of sour odours, sticky or slimy surfaces and discolouration. As long as we use common sense and follow the rule "when in doubt, throw it out" we are relatively safe from these bacteria.

Last, there are disease-causing bacteria (pathogens)— these are the bacteria that cause most food borne illnesses and are the bacteria we are most concerned with. Pathogens do not necessarily leave detectable odours or tastes in food. In other words, you can't tell if food is contaminated by smelling, tasting or looking at it. The only way to protect food against path-

What's
cookin'

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ogenic bacteria is by proper hygiene, sanitary food handling and storage techniques. In order to grow, bacteria need food, moisture, temperature (bacteria grow best at warm temperatures between 45 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit (F) — this is known as the Danger Zone), a neutral environment (not too acid or too alkaline), and time.

Bacteria do not have feet. They can only move from place to place with help. Foods become contaminated in any of the following ways: hands, coughs and sneezes, other foods, equipment and utensils, air, water, insects, rodents.

To protect against bacteria, we can do three things. First, we can prevent bacteria from spreading by not letting food touch anything that may contain disease-producing bacteria and protect the food from bacteria in the air by wrapping it well. Second, we can stop bacteria from growing. The easiest way to stop it from growing is by controlling the temperature. Below 45 degrees F or above 140 degrees F, the bacteria will not be killed, but the rate of growth is slowed dramatically. Third, we can kill bacteria. Most bacteria are killed if they are subjected to a temperature of 170 degrees F or higher for at least 30 seconds. This is how most equipment is sanitized. Some chemicals kill bacteria; they also can be used for sanitizing.

So, if you think about a pan of chicken laying on the counter waiting to be cooked for dinner or a head of lettuce that you did not wash being cut up for salad or a coconut cream pie sitting out at room temperature— all of these are perfect breeding grounds for pathogens.

Use common sense; wash your fruits and vegetables thoroughly; use good personal hygiene habits; wash your hands frequently and dry with a paper towel; keep foods stored either below 45 degrees F (in the refrigerator) or above 140 degrees F (in the oven); if you have foods in the danger zone temperature in order to prepare them, just get them out of the danger zone as quickly as possible and if in doubt, throw it out!

Have fun and keep cooking!

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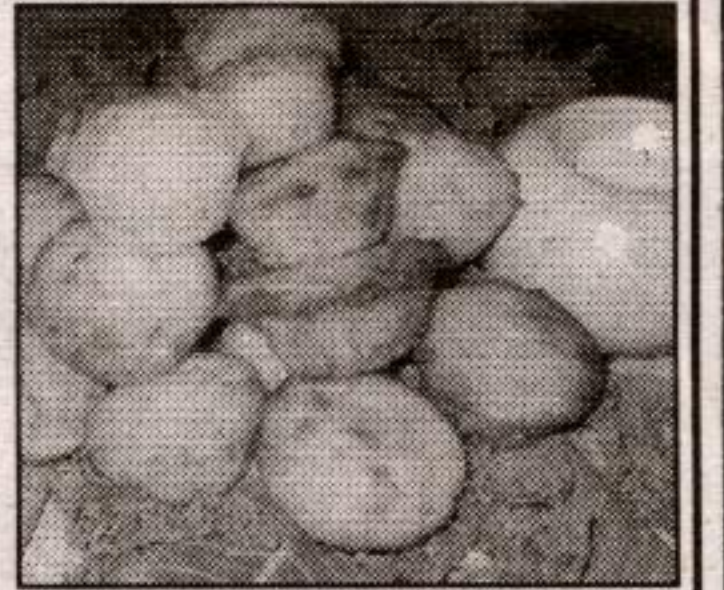
Mexican Cornbread

Ingredients

- 1 cup butter
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 4 eggs
- 4 oz green chilies, chopped
- 17 oz creamed corn
- 1/2 cup Monterey Jack cheese, grated
- 1/2 cup cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 4 tsp baking powder

Method

1. Have butter and eggs at room temperature.
2. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.
3. Grease and flour a 9"x13" baking dish.
4. Cream butter and sugar. Blend in eggs.
5. Stir in chilies, corn and cheese.
6. Combine remaining ingredients in a separate bowl. Mix well.
7. Add flour mixture to corn mixture, stirring until well blended. Pour into the baking dish.
8. Bake for 50-60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in centre comes out clean.
9. Cut into squares and serve warm.



Cook's note: If you'd like to make corn muffins instead, then spray the muffin tins with non-stick spray and fill 3/4 way full with mixture. Bake at 325 F degrees 10-25 minutes, depending on the size of the muffin tins. They should be golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the centre should come out clean.

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