



Tips for Newbies

By Ora Emmerich

UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers

Because food nourishes and sustains life, it often takes center stage at family gatherings, business meetings and other occasions where people congregate to interact. Many cooks take pride in presenting favorite recipes of delectable dishes, especially during the holiday season. In fact, at some family parties there may actually be a bit of a competition between cooks for the most delicious and artfully prepared dish. Imagine that.

Cooking and preserving food requires many steps that the seasoned homemaker takes for granted. So, what about the younger, less experienced members of the family who may be bringing a food contribution to the party for the first time? Should these newbies be thrown to the wolves (albeit in the shape of loving aunts and others)? Of course not. Here are some tips for the fresh-faced cook ready to step up and join the adult table.

First, avoid getting in too deep. No matter what, do not offer to follow a family recipe and bring the stuffing, green bean casserole or other immortalized family favorite. Never will it turn out like it does when the crafty old-timer who suggested it makes it. Choose instead a new recipe that seems simple and easy. If instructions indicate the recipe can be made ahead and reheated, so much the better. This probably is not the time to introduce the family to exotic ingredients, nor is it the time to run all over town trying to find ethnic specialties that may not exist in this country! Stick to foods the family knows and loves.

Do not be lazy. Try out the recipe before the big day. Follow all directions exactly, and if an instruction seems unclear, research the techniques by calling experienced cooks or checking on the internet. Many cooking sites include detailed instructions and videos to show exactly how to master cooking concepts.

Above all, do not poison the family. From picking fresh ingredients to serving the food on the big day, be sure to follow safe food handling rules. Keep cold foods cold until needed in the recipe. Avoid cross-contamination when preparing foods by keeping meat products separate from other foods and by carefully sanitizing surfaces between uses. Keep hot foods hot, and never allow foods to sit out longer than 2 hours at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F. Remember to reheat foods to 165°F before serving.

With advance planning and cooking trials, the newest cook in the family may just bring the next big favorite to the holiday table!

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.