

Storing Leftovers Safely



Two-Hour Rule

Discard any perishable foods left at room temperature longer than 2 hours total.

Chilling and Storing Leftovers

Leftovers should be stored in the refrigerator at 40°F or below. Divide leftovers in shallow containers for quicker cooling or cool pots of soups or stews in an ice water bath and stir to cool quickly before refrigeration. Label leftovers so you will know how long it has been in the refrigerator. Slice roast beef, ham, and turkey and place in shallow containers for storage. After bringing food home from restaurants, immediately store in the refrigerator and never leave it in the car for a long period of time.

Reheating Leftovers

Solid leftovers should be reheated to 165°F. Reheat sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil. Foods can be heated on a stove top, an oven, or a microwave. The oven temperature should be set no lower than 325°F. Check the temperature of food with a food thermometer. Be sure to reheat precooked foods such as hotdogs and deli-style meats in case of contamination before serving to young children, older adults, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems.

Large Gatherings

Serve hot food in chafing dishes, steamtables, slow cookers, or on warming trays to keep it above 140°F. Serve cold foods in small bowls nestled in a container of ice to keep them at 40°F or below. Replace empty bowls with new bowls rather than adding to food that has sat out. Discard any leftovers that have been sitting out for more than 2 hours.



The University of Georgia and Ft. Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and counties of the state cooperating. The Cooperative Extension Service and the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences offer educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex or disability.

**An Equal Opportunity Employer/Affirmative Action Organization
Committed to a Diverse Work Force**

Bulletin # FDNS-E-89-12

Date June 2003

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.
Gale A. Buchanan, Dean and Director